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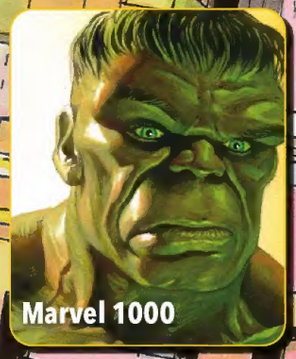

Marvel 1000

30 years of Batman the Movie

PLUS EXCLUSIVE STEVE MACMANUS BOOK CHAPTER & MILFORD GREEN & LADY FLINTLOCK CONCLUDE

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No big intro this month so we show you more art from our recent Batman cover competition, as we focus on 30 Years of Batman the Movie, Batman Adventures and the new Joker movie. Plus Marvel 1000, TV Comic, Ken Reid Soccer Strips and an exclusive preview of Steve (Tharg the Mighty) MacManus new novel. Next issue we focus on the Galaxy's Greatest Comic! See you then.

Your's Aye, Tony

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Artwork: John Charles

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A ROGUES GALLERY

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7.

7.

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We had a great response to our cover competition with some fabulous entries from our fantastic readers. Check out a few of them below.

1. Damian Edwardson. Two faces that would inspire fear as they come out of the shadows.
2. Paul Draper. A stylised Batman, this was one of the most unique interpretations of the Dark Knight.
3. Luke Haynes. Luke produced a set of covers with a modern edge and a retro feel all at the same time.
4. Adam Bagley. You can feel the fun Joker is having in this interpretation of the two characters.
5. Ade Hughes. The cape comes alive around Batman in this piece as Joker gazes into the face of Death.
6. Marc D Lewis. A tired and weary Batman which pulls you into the mind of Batman.
7. Ian Beadle. A classic look. Wouldn't look out of place as a panel in the pages of a DC Comic.
8. James Gray. A strong contender with a movie feel we loved this powerful interpretation.

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THE JOKER IN THE PACK

The Joker has been a regular fixture in Batman films and TV shows since the Dark Knight Detective first made the move to the small and then the big screen. Joaquin Phoenix joins the likes of Caesar Romero, Jack Nicholson, Heath Ledger, Jared Leto and the voice of Mark Hamill to play DC's Clown Prince Of Crime. However, Joker, out this October, will be like no other depiction of Jerry Robinson's co-creation. Joel Meadows takes a look at its genesis and development...

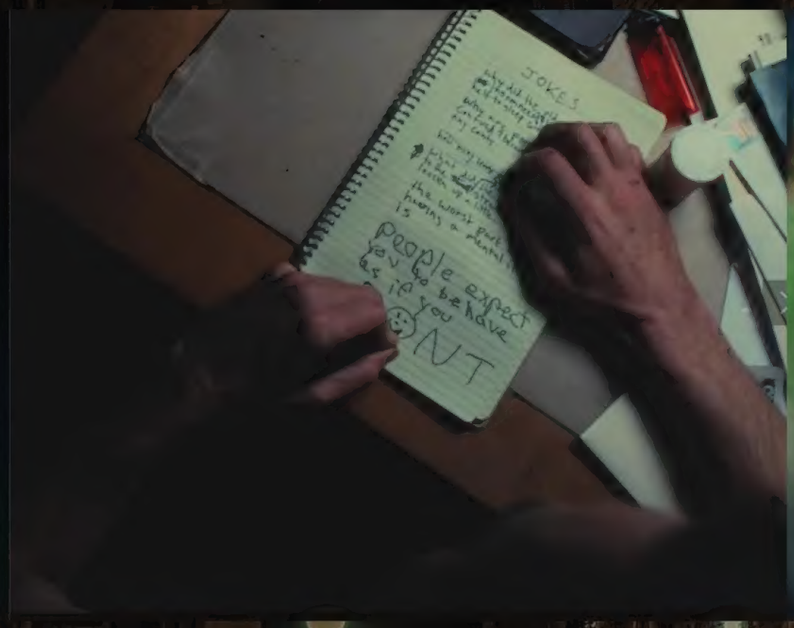
DC have had a much harder time of it than Marvel with the transition of their big iconic creations onto the big screen. Henry Cavill's Superman and Ben Affleck's Superman have been treated with mixed feelings from fans of superhero movies. Affleck has already left the role to be replaced by Robert Pattinson while it seems that Cavill has hung up his cape too. So could it fall to a left-field DC movie to offer something different that will engage with film fans?

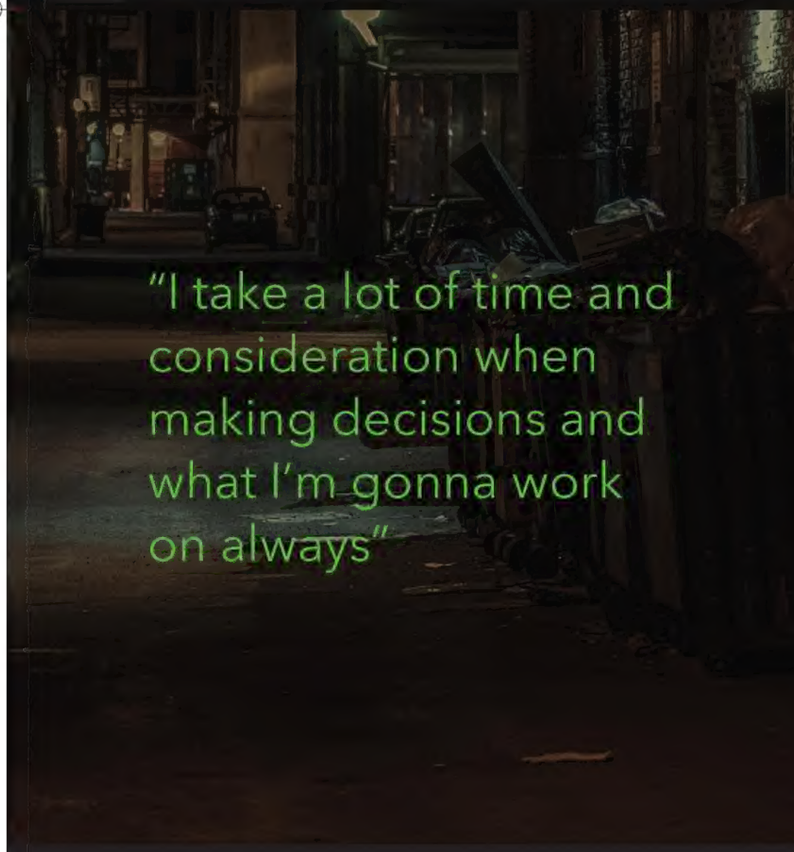
Joker is a $55m film directed by Todd Phillips, who has been responsible for hit comedy film series The Hangover. That budget is around a quarter of what a superhero film normally costs. Star Joaquin Phoenix comes from a series of indie films in recent years and the filmmakers admit that this film, while it shares a name with DC's ultimate villain, has moved away from its comic book origins. They would like this to kick off a new kind of DC movie with a different name. Here's what Phillips told Empire Magazine in July: "I said, 'Let Joker be the first, then let's get fucking great filmmakers to come in.'"

It was also important for a film like Joker to be very different to Marvel's box office monoliths, as Phillips explained again to Empire: "Instead of trying to live in the shadow of that beast, let's do something they can't do. I said 'Let's strip all that [hoopla] away. It'll be liberating."

Watching the first trailer that was released earlier this year, Joker looks like it couldn't be further away from the bombast of Captain America and Iron Man in giant CGI fist fights. There is a quiet, unsetting darkness to the characters here and it looks like Phillips has approached Joker as if it were a lowish budget indie film.

COMIC SCENE JOKER FEATURE





"I take a lot of time and consideration when making decisions and what I'm gonna work on always"

In the same Empire chat, Phillips went on to point out that this Joker isn't the same character that we have seen in any of the portrayals in the comics over the past eight decades:

"We didn't follow anything from the comic books, which people are going to be mad about. We just wrote our own version of where a guy like Joker might come from. That's what was interesting to me. We're not even doing Joker, but the story of becoming Joker. It's about this man."

Actor Phoenix really lived the role too, with it staying with him after they had finished shooting each day, as he pointed out in the same Empire piece that Phillips chatted in.

"We went home and would text each other for hours and then finally go, 'We gotta just talk,' and we'd call each other and talk for two hours about the day, and the scenes coming up. We were just immersed in it. It's the best way to work," he explained.

Arthur Fleck becomes Joker but Phoenix isn't that keen to talk too much about the character he becomes on screen. He

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offered a few clues and snippets again in the Empire piece from July.

"I don't wanna talk about things...in the most broad clichés, it sounds awful...Part of it is about the emergence of this other thing that has been inside of you your whole life. That you have tried to suppress. It's about trying to fit in, whether it's material or behaviour," he explained.

In an interview with Collider in 2018, he revealed why he decided to come on board Joker:

"I take a lot of time and consideration when making decisions and what I'm gonna work on always. So, in some ways, the process, which is obviously reading a script and meeting a filmmaker and then continuing to have meetings and discussions with Todd [Phillips]. I think he's very impressive and he seems to have a very interesting understanding of this world and what he's trying to say. And so there is something very appealing about that and working with him on this particular project. It feels unique, it is its own world in some ways, and maybe, mostly, it scares the fucking shit out of me or something. It might as well be the thing that scares you the most."

The Joker has been played by some of the best onscreen actors in film but he seemed to come to terms with this, he explained in the same interview with Collider back in 2018: "It's a magnified version of what you deal with as an actor. So, when you get a script, obviously, the writer– usually for me, it's

"...add to the Scorsese connection, Robert DeNiro is in Joker, who plays talk show host Murray Franklin"

the writer/director, last several years I've worked with a filmmaker that was the writer and director– and they have their expectation, and they've imagined things in their head, and they've imagined different actors, and suddenly you take it on and so there's this moment of anxiety of 'Did I live up to their expectations?' And at some point you have to just own it and say like, 'I can't consider who they might have thought up before or what the movie was for the 6 months ago, this is what it is now and I have to find my way into it.' And so in some ways it's a very similar experience, right? But it feels magnified because it's not just one person's expectations, but what you're telling me is that there's at least a dozen."

And it's not just Phillips and Phoenix who give this film a different pedigree to your typical comicbook movie either. Producer Emma Tillinger Koskoff has worked with none other than Martin Scorsese on all of his films since 2006 and to add to the Scorsese connection, Robert DeNiro is in Joker, who plays talk show host Murray Franklin.

The first part of 2019 belonged to Marvel with the huge box office returns for Avengers: Endgame but DC's dark horse in the pack Joker could create a paradigm shift for filmgoers looking for something new. We shall find out in October.

Joker hits cinemas on 4 October.

Author: Joel Meadows | **Twitter:** @joelmeadows1 | **Website:** www.tripwiremagazine.co.uk

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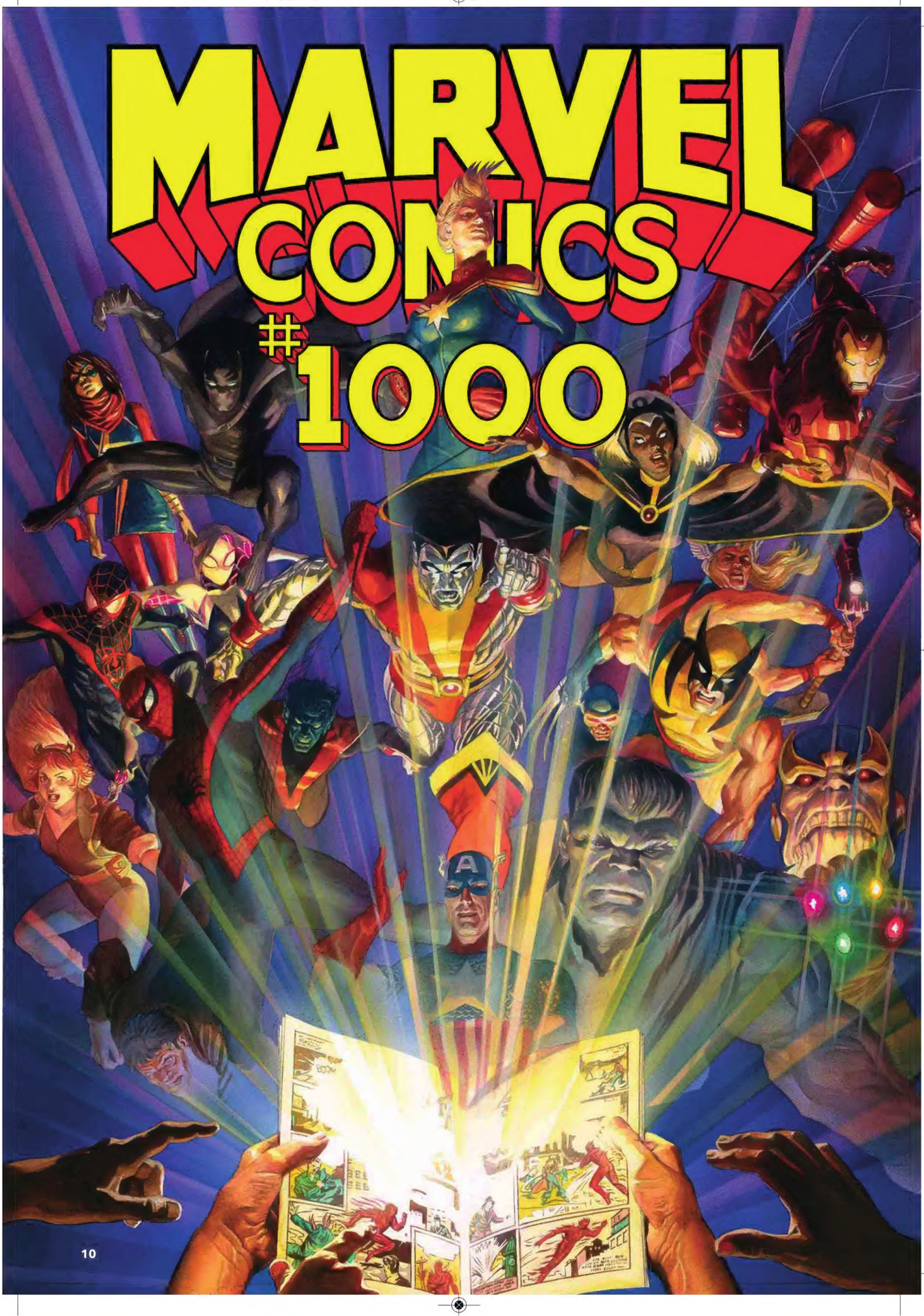

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After making his name penning Judge Dredd and other top thrills including Zombo and Damnation Station for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic, Al Ewing has in recent years become one of Marvel Comics's leading authors. Currently scripting Immortal Hulk and co-writing the Jane Foster-centred Valkyrie with Jason Aaron as well as the Avengers No Surrender and No Road Home weekly series with Jim Zub and Mark Waid, the York-based scribe has now been charged with overseeing the House of Idea's giant-sized 80th anniversary special, Marvel 1000, which has grown so large that the 96-page August one-off has now spawned a sequel in the form of September's forty-page Marvel 1001.

"It's certainly a big honour that Marvel would ask me to take on such a large role in such a big project like this one," says Ewing, who recalls picking up UK reprints of series like Secret Wars from his local newsagent while growing up in the 1980s, although he describes Marvel 1000 as "more of a dream come true from a professional context, as I have many loves, and Marvel is only one of them. But for them to put this much faith in me is a big thing, and getting to create a couple of big, bold new playing pieces for their universe is definitely an aspect of this that I love."

Ewing believes that his intricate work on 2018's You Are Deadpool mini-series - which emulated the format of a Fighting Fantasy-style Choose Your Own Adventure gamebook and required him to simultaneously juggle several storylines - that demonstrated to Marvel that he would be up to the job of coordinating Marvel 1000's convoluted overreaching story.

"Nobody asked me to do that with You Are Deadpool, as the original brief was to do a five-issue Deadpool mini-series with multiple artists," he explains. "So by working up You Are Deadpool, I probably showed editorial that I was capable of handling big, complex projects and, in fact, I have

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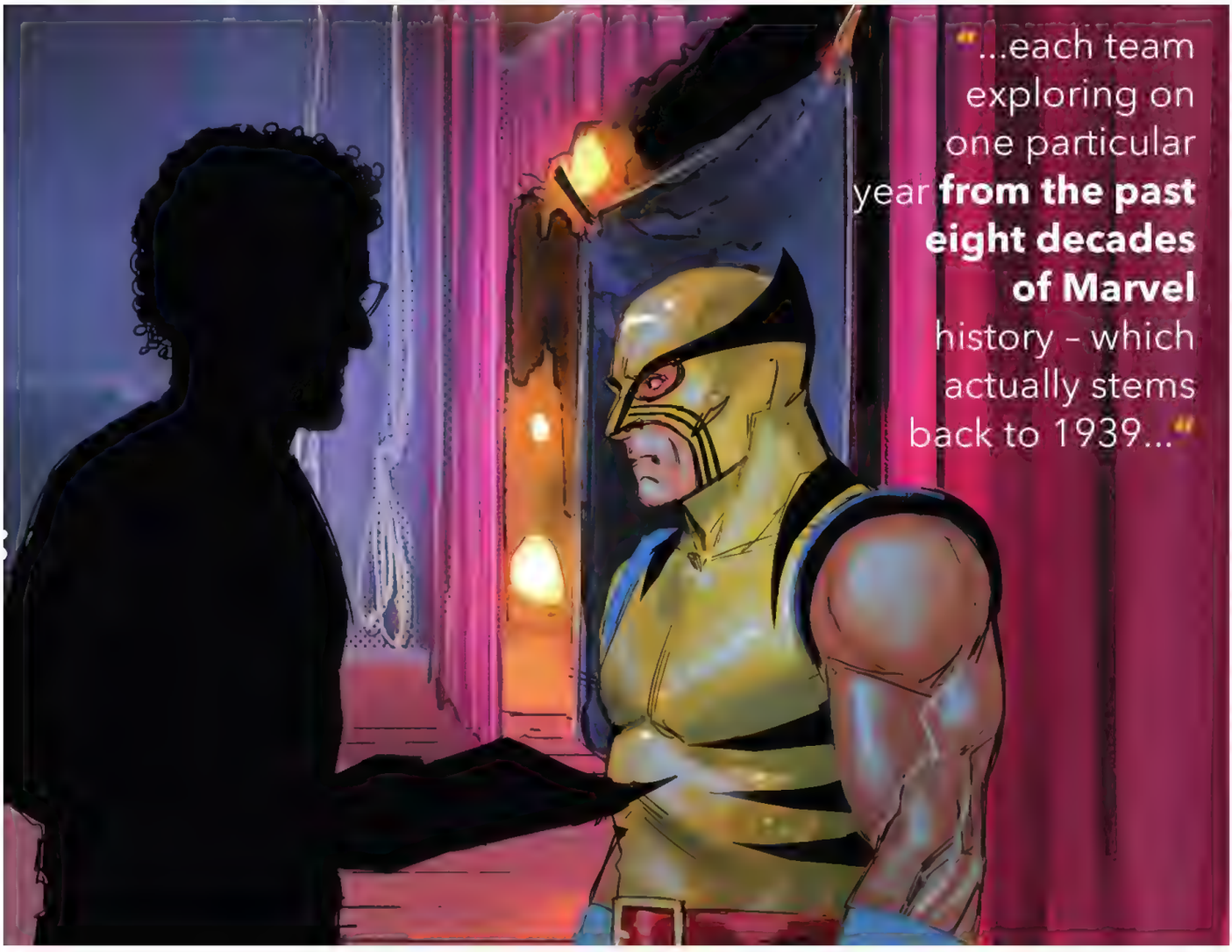
"...each team exploring on one particular year **from the past eight decades of Marvel** history - which actually stems back to 1939..."

an appetite for them. I like solving problems and working out puzzles in the context of work, and if a story problem gets put in front of me, I can't let it go. It's compulsive, as I'll keep turning it over and over until I've come up with at least a solution - even if it doesn't turn out to be the solution, and it's what I tend to bring to collaborations like Avengers: No Surrender."

Written and drawn by eighty separate creative teams that apart from Ewing also include Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse's Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, Joe Hill, Toby Whithouse, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Brad Meltzer, Black Eyed Peas's Taboo and Mad Magazine's Bill Morrison, Marvel #1000 is composed of eighty one-pagers that link together to form one big story. "When were first conceptualizing the book, we tossed around a whole bunch of different ideas at one of our creative retreats – some of which went into this issue, some of which moved into other projects," explains Marvel Executive Editor Tom Brevoort, who reveals that he also took inspiration from a recent seasonal special that Ewing had actually also contributed to.

"But I was already starting to lean in this direction, as I had read last year's X-Men Holiday Special, which was set up like an advent calendar," he adds. "I thought that was a terrific idea, but I also saw some opportunities to expand on and improve on what had been done there. I also remembered an issue of Superman Adventures that Mark Millar had done, in which Mark told 22 single-page stories about Superman that made up a larger whole. Taking that approach meant that we'd be able to cast a wider net and likely get buy-in from creators whose tight work schedules couldn't accommodate a longer piece, but who might be able to do a single page. As I wrote my outreach letter to people, it would virtually take as much time to say no as it would to write a page, so the barrier to entry was very low."

According to Ewing, coming up with a satisfying story in such a succinct space is much harder than you might think. "One page stories are always a little harder to do than they look, even when you're stringing them together to make a larger story," he insists. "I've found a particular seven-panel structure that you can really cram a lot of information into, and that helped, and if you look through the book, you might notice how many pages fall into that particular structure. But I used a lot of different formats and pacing methods to keep things varied, and hopefully the result works in concert with all the other single pages we've gathered from across the industry and outside!"

With each team exploring on one particular year from the past eight decades of Marvel history – which actually stems back to 1939 when Marvel Comics #1, which featured the original Human Torch, was first published under the banner of Timely Comics – Ewing admits that it was a difficult decision when it came to deciding what particular twelve-month periods that he should personally focus on. "I grabbed a lot of years in the forties and fifties, which was essentially because I knew that the later years would be hotly contested," he reasons. "Lots of people would want to do a Spidey story, but not so many would want to do a story about the Three Xs or the Thunderer – except me, that is!"

With Brevoort crediting Ewing with being "the conceptual architect of the structure of the issue," Ewing was tasked with conceiving the overriding plotline, which centred around the Eternity Mask, a shadowy device whose roots actually dates back to August 1939's Marvel

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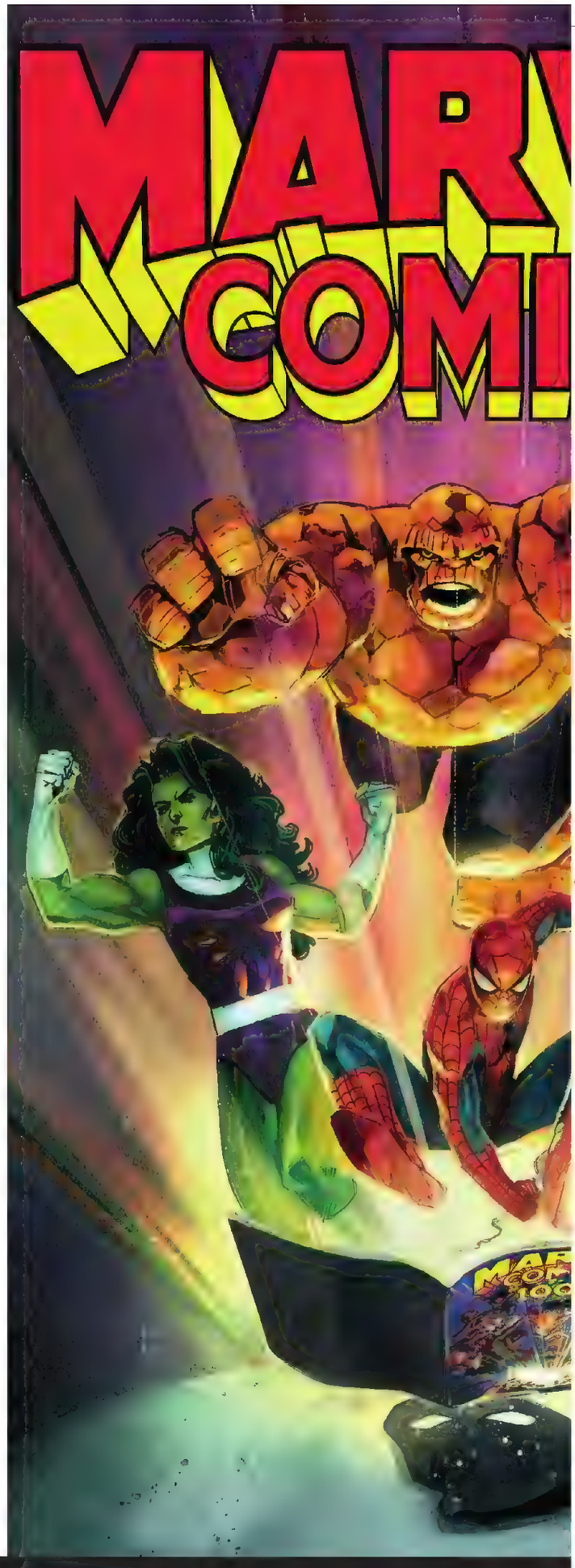
"...on one of the most beautiful pages of the book, too – **we've thrown in a third thing,** just because we could, although **wild horses couldn't drag that secret out of me...**"



Comics #1. "Al wrote what we've been referring to as the 'spine' story of the issue, around which all of the other single pages fall," he explains. "He laid out the initial road map for the issue, and wrote a large chunk of it for that very reason."

"It starts off as a weird mystery in the roots of the Marvel Universe and slowly morphs into a more standard celebratory book," adds Ewing. "Except that the weird mystery is still there, bubbling away, and eventually it's going to bite you! I want readers to relax into the celebration, but to always be wondering when the next domino will fall. Like one of those stories where there's a big party going on, but midnight is drawing closer and that will be the Unmasking Hour..."

From Christian Ward to Chris Weston and Mike Deodato Jr., Ewing was given the opportunity to collaborate with many leading artists, although he is reluctant to pick out his favourites. "It was fascinating to see all these different styles and modes of working play out," he says. "But I will say that it was a particular honour to work with George Perez, as I was slightly in awe of the man! I only had one page, so

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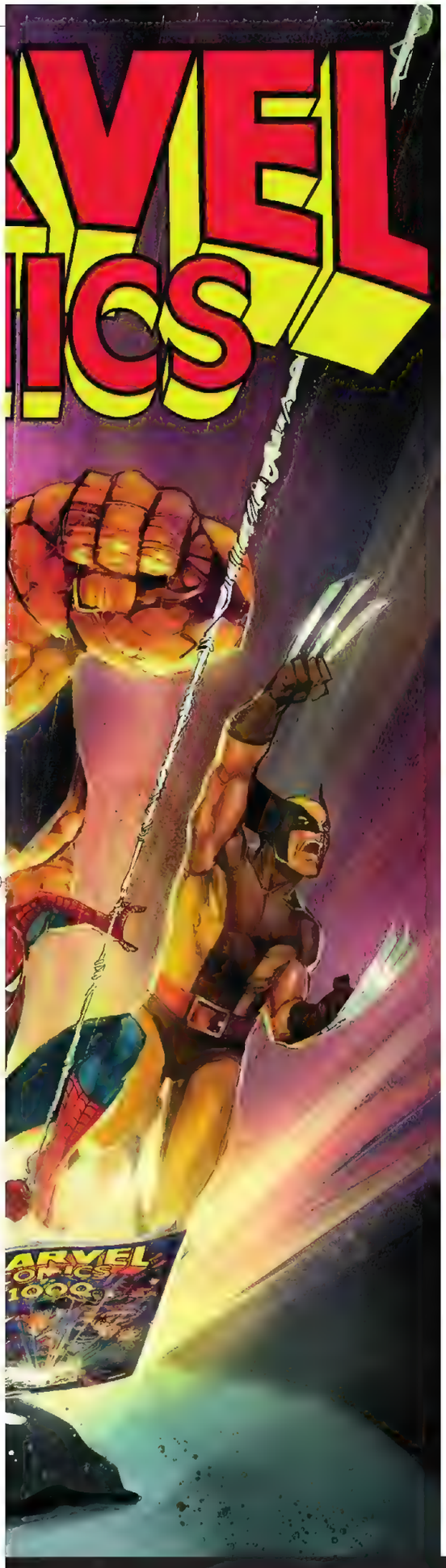
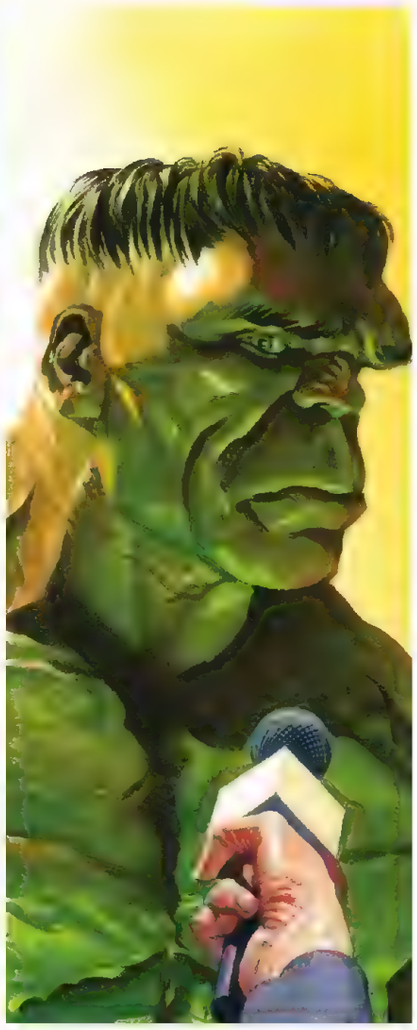


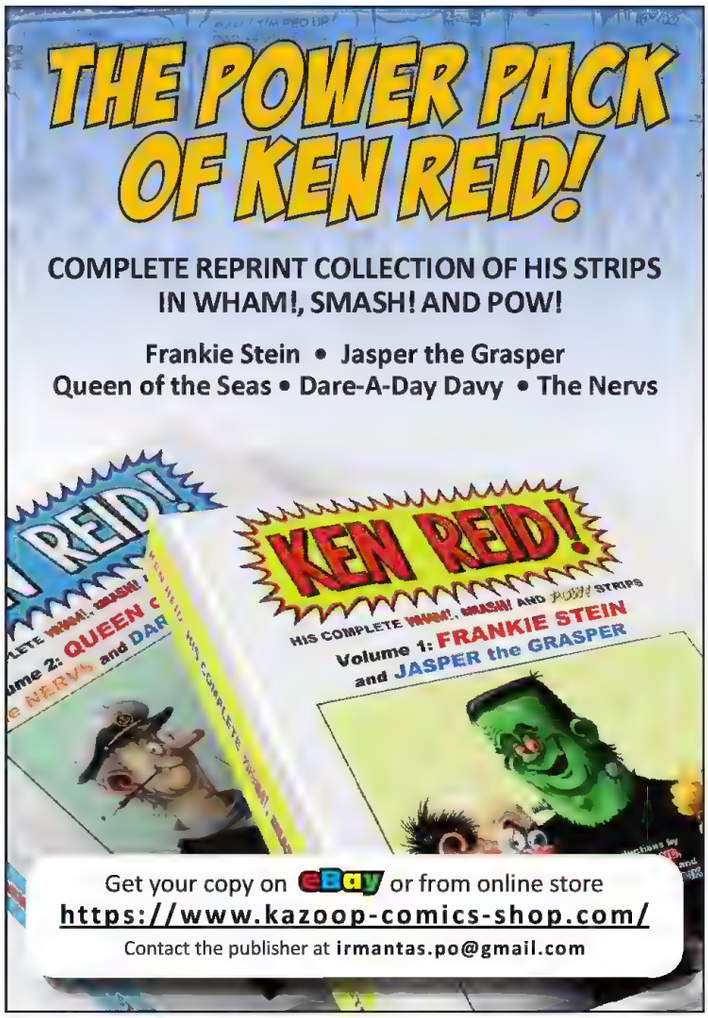


I gave him a simple five-panel script, knowing that he would do his thing – and he did his thing, which you'll see for yourself when it comes out. Doing the lettering draft for that page was just a pure joy, as George is a master craftsman of storytelling, and I got to really appreciate that from the inside."

While it has been promised that Marvel #1000 and the Eternity Mask will have a significant impact on the Marvel Universe going forward, Ewing is reluctant to reveal too many details. "I don't want to get too spoilery, but I will say that my favourite retcons are the ones that play fair, as they don't say 'this thing you read never happened,' but instead say 'you read this but now look at it from this angle, with a this bit of information you didn't know at the time'," he teases. "This is built from that idea, across a whole fictional universe, so it's like 'You've read this, and that, but you probably didn't read this other thing but it saw print, so now put them together.' And the one-page-a-year format means we can do that in hopefully a very accessible way, giving everyone the information they need right there and then in the package itself."

Apart from The Eternity Mask, Marvel Comics #1000 and #1001 will also shine a new, even more sinister light on a particular band of obscure bad guys. "Every protagonist needs an antagonist, so in addition to bringing in the Eternity Mask, we're rejuvenating and elevating a long-forgotten group of villains into a force that could destroy worlds," continues Ewing. "And then, right at the very last minute, on one of the most beautiful pages of the book, too – we've thrown in a third thing, just because we could, although wild horses couldn't drag that secret out of me. So this isn't just an eightieth birthday party – it's a surprise party! And I hope you'll join us!"

Author: Stephen Jewell | **Twitter:**@stephenjewell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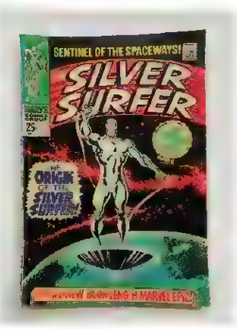

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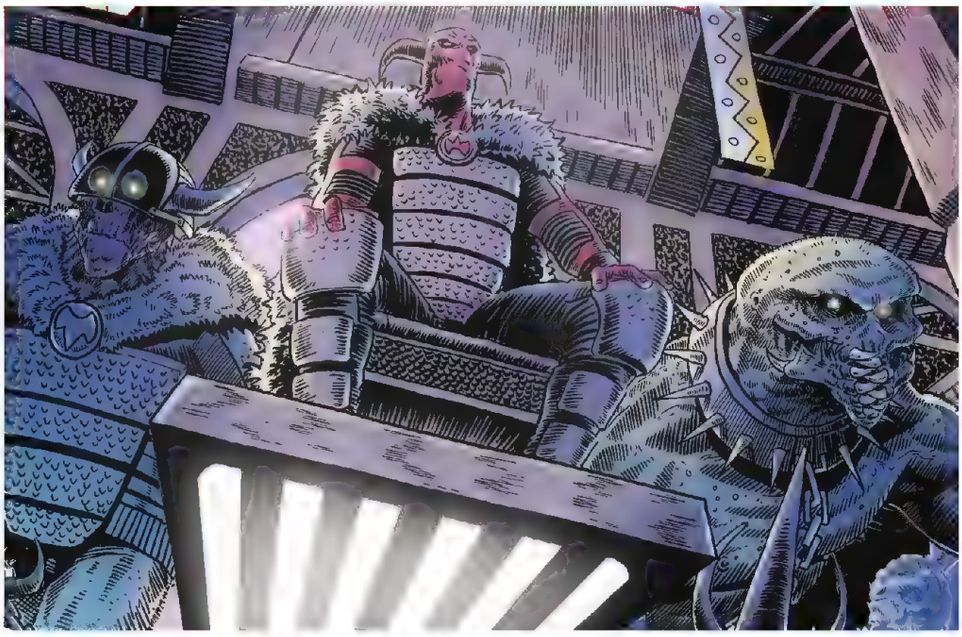
ROK THE GOD

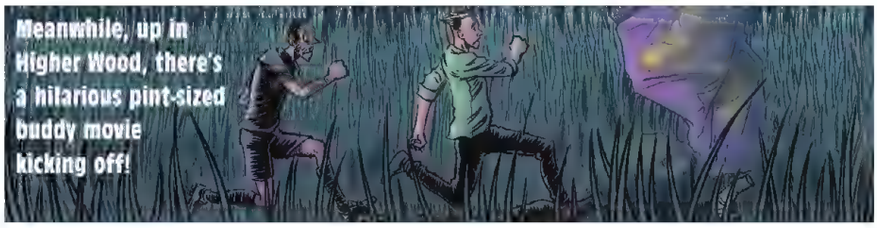


COMING SOON TO KICKSTARTER

The second 'season' of John Wagner, Alan Grant and Dan Cornwell's surprisingly popular Alien footie saga launches on Kickstarter on October 2.

ROK THE GOD, to be published as a complete graphic novel, tells the tale of the death of Rok's mother, the redoubtable Lady Vorga, and Rok's elevation to Godhood.

Accepting Godhood earns Rok the enmity of the cunning and murderous Skrel. Can the Skrel extinguish a God? They're certainly going to try. None of this is conducive to Radford Reds' promotion hopes – nor indeed is the takeover of the club by the vile and rapacious Malcolm Griedy.



ROK THE GOD is every bit as funny and exciting as its predecessor Rok of the Reds, the story of the world's first alien footballer. It's beautifully drawn and coloured again by Dan Cornwell and Abby Bulmer. US comic size, 120 pages plus (and a possible hard cover option). New publisher RedRok Comics will launch in summer, 2020.

Look out for us on Kickstarter from October 2 • Follow us on Twitter @RedsRok
Find us on Facebook: bit.ly/rokyerfacebook • Check for the hashtag #Roktober

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My best Batman of the 90s
It's all about the

BATMAN ADVENTURES

Oh yes, if you ask me, the greatest Batman run of all time is Batman Adventures (1992-1995) & the best Batman graphic novel ever is Batman Adventures: Mad Love (1994). You can take your Dark Knight Returns, your Killing Joke, or any of your favourites and you still won't convince me. Batman Adventures and Mad Love are just the very best of Batman.

Batman Adventures
(Oct 1992- Oct 1995, 36 issues
2 annuals and 3 specials)

In the 80-year history of Batman, there are many, many incredible comics, many wonderful graphic novels and you'll find plenty of lists out there that talk about what are considered the greatest Batman stories. You'll soon find mention of all the favourites, whether that's Frank Miller and Klaus Janson's Dark Knight Returns, Alan Moore and Brian Bolland's Killing Joke, Frank Miller and David Mazzucchelli's Batman: Year One. Or perhaps you prefer Arkham Asylum, Hush, The Man Who Laughs, The Court Of Owls, Strange Apparitions, Gotham By Gaslight, Batman Year 100, Son of the Demon... oh, I could simply keep going until I run out of space here.

Yet, in all those best of Batman lists you could find, I doubt you'd find MY favourite Batman series or my favourite Batman graphic novel. But, despite all that, I will sit down and argue with anyone who disagrees that there has never been a better run of Batman stories than you'll find in the world of The Batman Adventures.

Developed as an adaptation of the Bruce Timm/ Eric Randomski helmed Batman Animated Series that debuted just before the comic in 1992, The Batman Adventures was simply a breath of fresh air that enchanted me at a time when I was rapidly falling out of love with superhero comics.

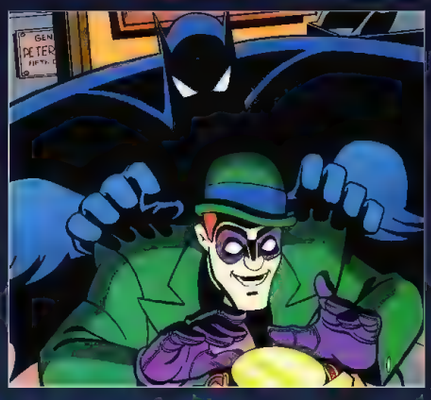
By 1992, we'd gone through the era of Watchmen, Dark Knight Returns et al and we were seeing titles such as DC's Swamp Thing, Hellblazer, Animal Man, and Doom Patrol spearheading a move into more mature comics that would, a year later, see the launch of the DC Vertigo imprint. But in terms of straight superhero comics, the late 80s/early 90s weren't the best of times. Everything just seemed miserable, as a succession of lesser talents looked at the revolutionary superhero works of Watchmen and Dark Knight Returns and jumped on board, with each new title seeming to give new meaning to the law of diminishing returns. Batman was no exception, with every new writer wanting to do something grimmer and grittier than

the last. Alongside this, the early 90s were the Image Comics years, where every new title featured superstar artists cranking out hyper-exaggerated mockeries of comics, full of splash pages, throwing anatomy out the window and just drawing whatever they thought looked cool, whether it suited the story or added anything to the flow of the pages of story.

And then came The Batman Adventures, something as far away from both the grim and gritty superheroes of Marvel and DC and the exaggerated Image style as you could get. In the style of the animated series, the comic was full of stylish yet beautifully simple artwork, a lesson in fabulously spare storytelling that did everything it needed to without being showy or overdoing things. In a superhero world I no longer enjoyed it was a bright light of beautiful, simple, perfect comics and swiftly became the best and then the only superhero series I could look at during those dark days.

The early issues were drawn by Ty Templeton and Brad Rader and written by Kelley Puckett and Marty Pasko, but from issue 7 all the way through to the end of Volume 1, issue 36 (bar a few later issues - 29-31, 33), writer Puckett and inker Rich Burchett were joined by the incredibly talented penciller and cover artist Mike Parobeck. His art simply stood out as a beacon of clarity from a superb draughtsman and storyteller.

The Batman Adventures was driven by simplicity, fun yet intelligent, designed to be appealing to children, yet never talking down, making it an absolute delight to read, whatever your age. Puckett created excellent stories, usually self-contained in one issue. And Parobeck's artwork matched the stories all the way, often working on 4/5 panel pages yet always delivering thrilling and inventive storytelling.



PAROBECK'S ARTWORK MATCHED THE STORIES ALL THE WAY

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The comic showed just what could be accomplished from wonderful storytelling from writers and artists who could craft great stories with an economy and simplicity that belied the incredible craft involved. In another world, Parobeck would be seen in the same way as Jaime Hernandez, a huge influence on his work. But there was also a knowledge of the greats, with elements of someone like Alex Toth's ability to craft a page of amazing clarity and informational depth with simple strokes. Sadly, Parobeck passed away in 1996, a victim of diabetes at the far too young age of 30, yet his artwork, often criticised as 'too cartoony' in his lifetime become not only celebrated but influential. Mike Parobeck really is an artist who deserves far more recognition than he receives.

Batman Adventures
Mad Love (Feb 1994)

And then, in the middle of this incredible run of The Batman Adventures comics, the creators of the Batman Animated TV series came together to produce what would come to be what I think of as the best Batman graphic novel of all time - Mad Love. Written by Bruce Timm and Paul Dini, with art by Timm and Glen Murakami, Mad Love told the tale of poor Harley Quinn, a Timm/Dini creation from the animated series.

Desperately in love with her boss, The Joker, Mr J, Harley's willing to do anything for him, suffer anything for him, anything to make him happy, or simply get his attention. And that's the crux of the tale, as poor Harley hatches a brilliant plan to capture Batman, to give her love the one thing he's never managed to get for himself. Surely Mr J would love her then? Sadly, for poor, poor Harley, the answer was always no.

Mad Love is a truly magnificent thing, full of all the beautifully realised art style that came from the animated show, the same clarity and effortlessly simple yet wonderfully effective storytelling that made The Batman Adventures monthly comic such a delight. But, with the bigger page count, Dini and Timm get to tell a fabulous yarn, part Harley's origin tale, part a fun-filled romp, and part a strangely melancholic and sad exploration of unfulfilled, obsessive love.

However, there are a couple of issues that have to be addressed with Mad Love. Firstly, the easy one, is it a graphic

THE BEST BATMAN GRAPHIC NOVEL OF ALL TIME... MAD LOVE

novel? Yes, I call it my favourite Batman graphic novel, but as a 60-ish page comic, it's a bit of a reach. Thing is, it's about the same size as Moore and Bolland's The Killing Joke and no-one seems to argue about that being a graphic novel. Maybe graphic novella, maybe just favourite Batman album, to adopt a European flavor of format naming, but it still stands as my favourite Batman graphic novel (and it's my choice so I get to argue it's my favourite Batman graphic novel, graphic novella, collection, whatever. Since the initial publication, things have become simpler, as there's now both a deluxe hardcover version and a collection, Mad Love & Other Stories, where it's bundled in with some other, almost as excellent tales from other Batman Adventures Specials and Annuals.

The other thing is a more problematic one. As I say, it's a tale of Harley's obsessional love, but taken another way, it's a tale of the mentally and physically abusive relationship between Harley and Joker. And there are just too many times where that relationship is played, uncomfortably, for laughs. But, what I think is the saving grace of the book, the thing that makes me love it so much, is that Harley is also setting off on her journey out of this abusive relationship, a journey with setbacks and relapses certainly, but a journey to a better life nonetheless. It's a problematic graphic novel, but many of the very best examples from the past often are. And whilst you can criticise Dini and Timm's portrayal of Harley Quinn in Mad Love, you can't deny that they have also managed to tell a tale of a rounded, fabulous character, full of contradictions and delights, of madness, of sadness, whose story is not only relatable but hopeful. Harley is a fabulous character and it's thanks to the foundations created here that she's become such a hugely popular character in the decades that have followed.

The Batman Adventures and Batman Adventures: Mad Love are two perfect examples of Batman comics that go against the prevailing styles of the time to create works that have proved timeless, wonderful, and character defining moments. In the history of Batman, these will stand out, whether it's 80, 100, hopefully 200 years that we're celebrating.

Author: Richard Bruton | **Twitter:**@richardbruton

MILFORD-GREEN

Prettiest Village in the British Empire, 1897

Written by Samuel George London (@SamuelGLondon)
Artwork by Mikael Hankonen (@YearInHereafter)

Print and digital copies available from www.SignalComics.com

THE STORY SO FAR:

Special Agent Fandlag, from the United Galactic Alliance crash landed in the Victorian village of Milford Green. With only moments to live he gave a mysterious object known as the Weran to socially awkward inventor, Alfie Fairfield. However, the evil Cinux have followed and are now threatening to kill the entire village unless they are given the Weran. Along with Mr Wells and his daughter, Mary, they hatch a plan to save Milford Green.

«THEY WERE EXPECTING US. MY LORD, SUDRE IS DEAD»
Lord knows I don't have anything to do with this! You have to believe me!
Silence human
«Things are about to get interesting»
They've seen us.
...let's go back inside.

OUT NOW!

The Victorian space adventure comic continues with Beyond Milford Green! Available digitally and in print from www.SignalComics.com/Beyond

KLIK
<Shall I fire upon them, my lord?>
<You imbecile!>
SHOVE
PHAT
<The Weran is out of its shell. If you even come close to shooting it, it will kill us all.>
<We'll have to do this the old-fashioned way.>
<Nulas, are you in position with the human?>
<Good. Let the hunt begin!>
THUMP!

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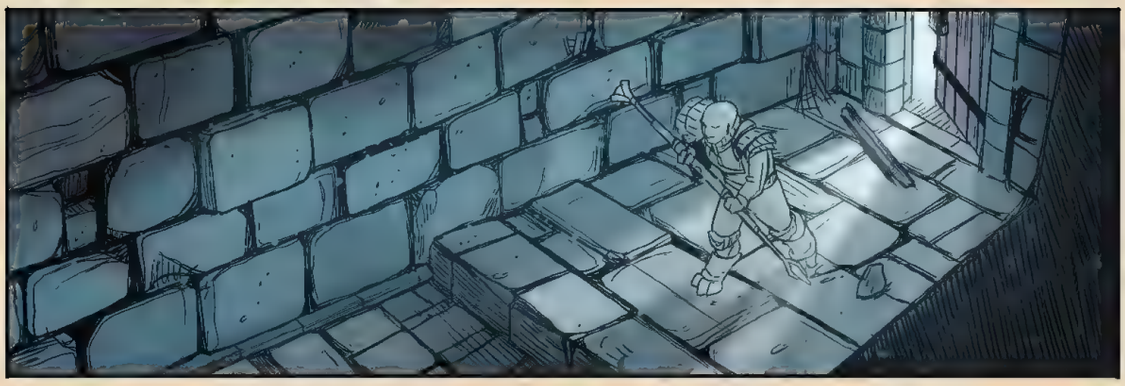

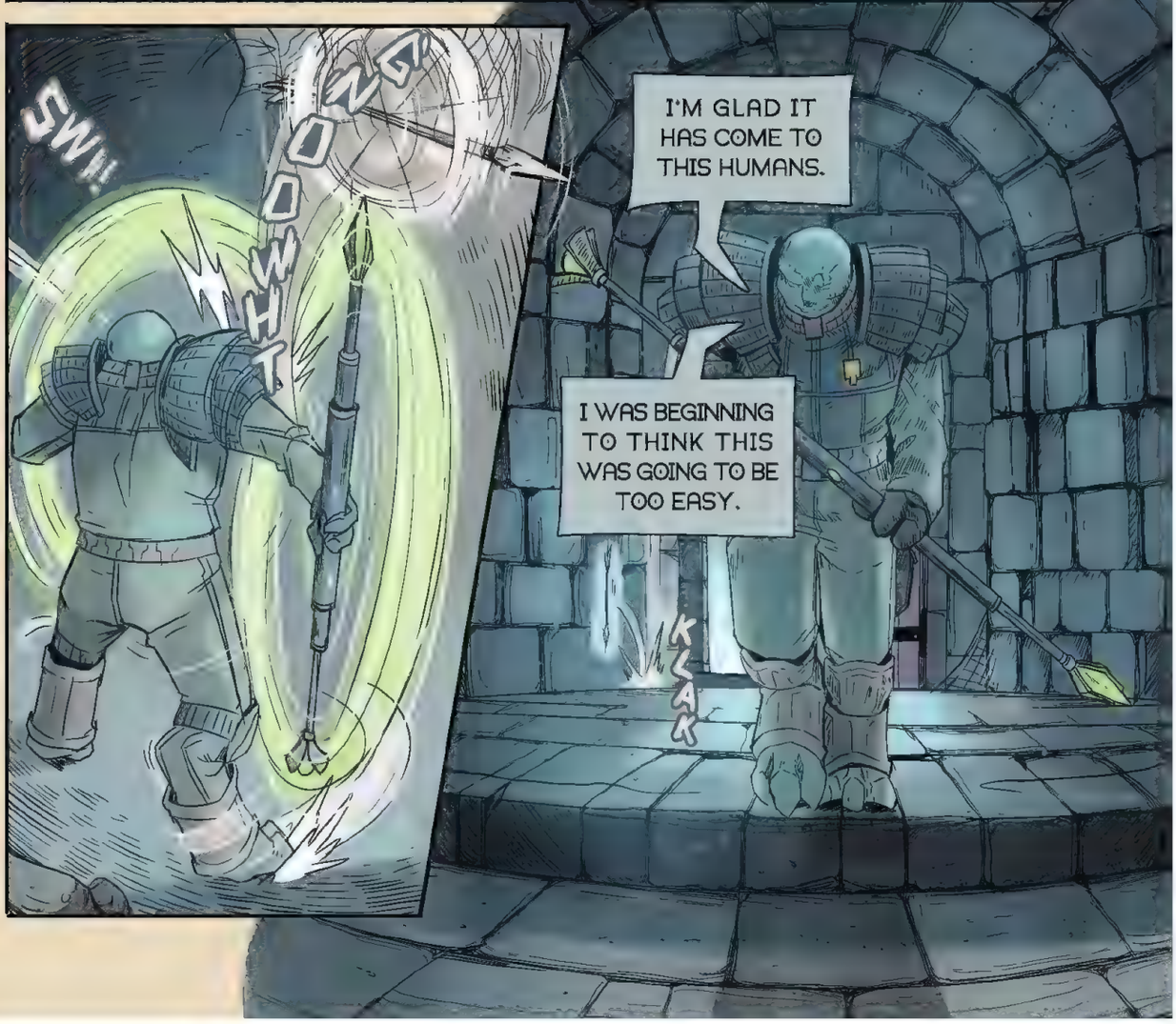

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CRACK
AAAAAAARGH!
And where do you think you're going?
THUMP
They killed Nulas with some poison, so I was coming to find you.
Is that right!?
Yes, of course.
As I said before, all I care about is staying alive.
In that case, take this and Fight by my side.
GLACK

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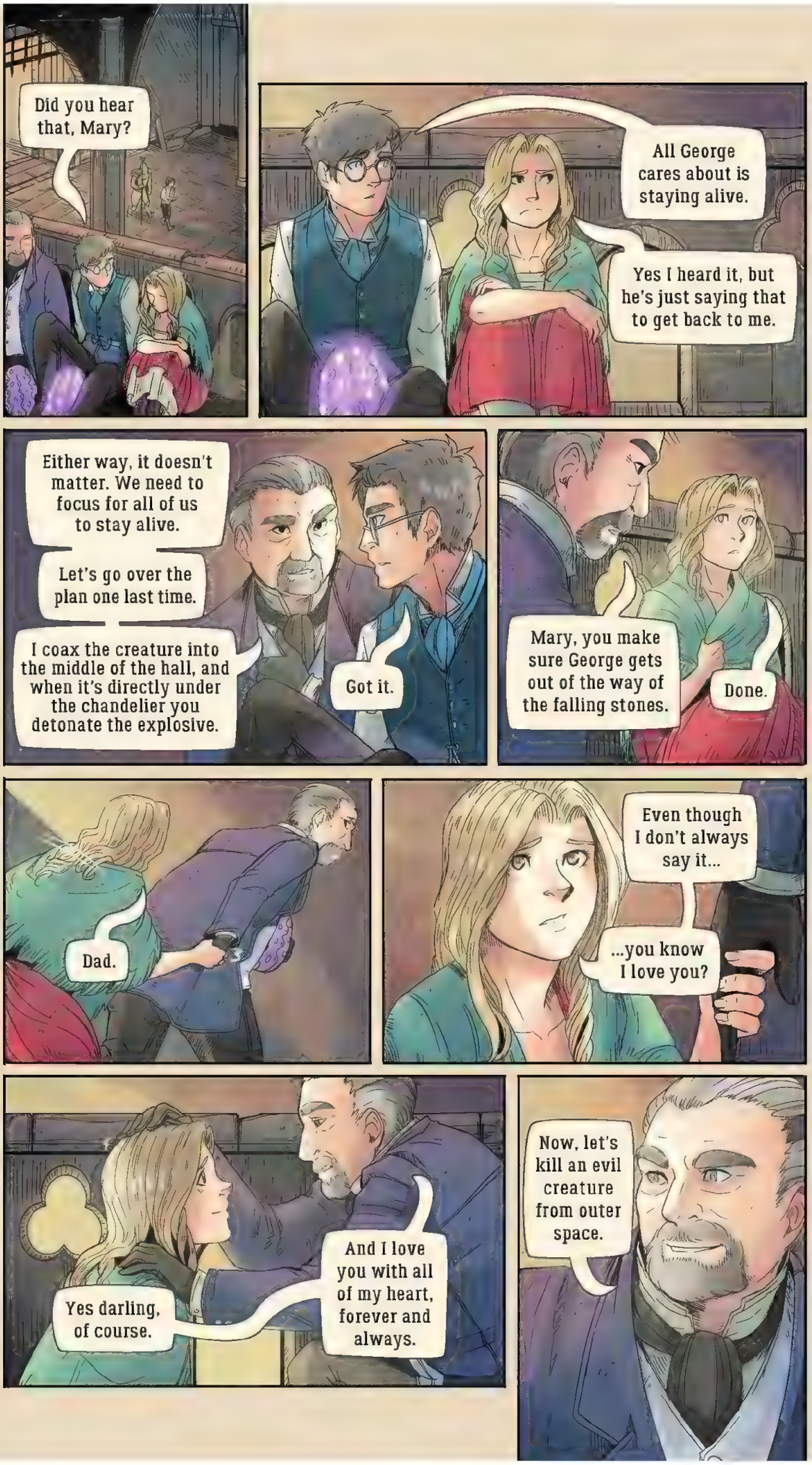
Did you hear that, Mary?
All George cares about is staying alive.
Yes I heard it, but he's just saying that to get back to me.
Either way, it doesn't matter. We need to focus for all of us to stay alive.
Let's go over the plan one last time.
I coax the creature into the middle of the hall, and when it's directly under the chandelier you detonate the explosive.
Got it.
Mary, you make sure George gets out of the way of the falling stones.
Done.
Dad.
Even though I don't always say it...
...you know I love you?
Yes darling, of course.
And I love you with all of my heart, forever and always.
Now, let's kill an evil creature from outer space.

CREATURE!
Human.
I believe this is what you're looking for?
You might be able to trick one of my underlings old man but I am a General in the most powerful army in this galaxy.
George, move away from the chandelier. It's set to explode.
That's your game, is it.
KATOV, THE CHANDELIER IS SET TO EXPLODE!

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The only problem now is that if you want to kill me, you'll have to come with me.
NO!
I'll give you what you want!
So predictable.
Bring the Weran to me boy.
Alfie, don't do it!
I'm sorry, Mr Wells. I don't have a choice.
Well, I do.
KLICKET
KRABOOM
BANG!
DAAAD!
CRASH!

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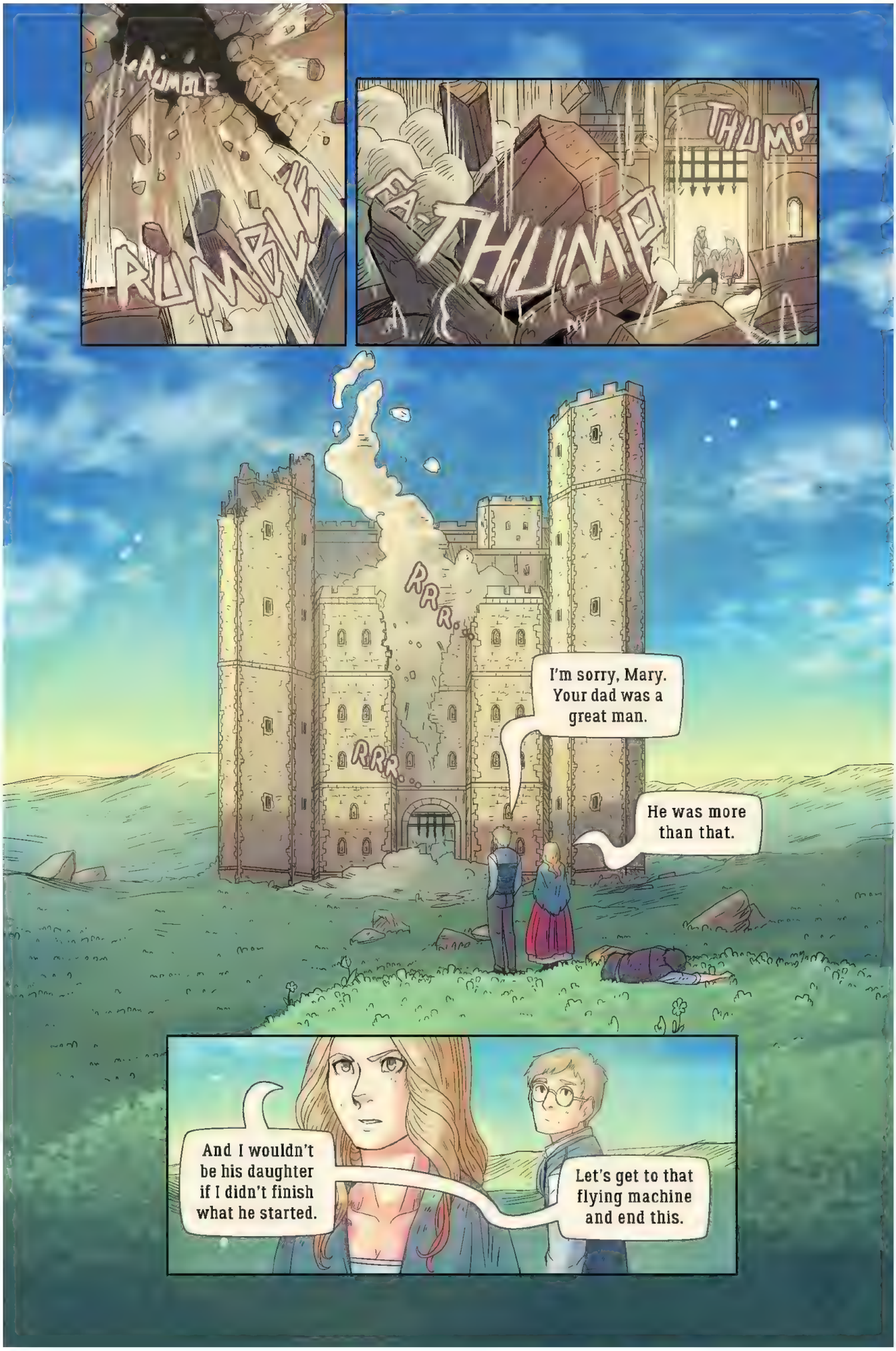
RUMBLE
RUMBLY
THUMP
KA-THUMP
RRR.
RRR.
I'm sorry, Mary. Your dad was a great man.
He was more than that.
And I wouldn't be his daughter if I didn't finish what he started.
Let's get to that flying machine and end this.

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How do you suppose we open it?
I'm not entirely sure, but this looks like a door. We've just got to work out how to open it.
Maybe try with the Weran?
THUNK
WOW!
You don't see that every day!
THUNK
You don't kill evil creatures from another world every day either!

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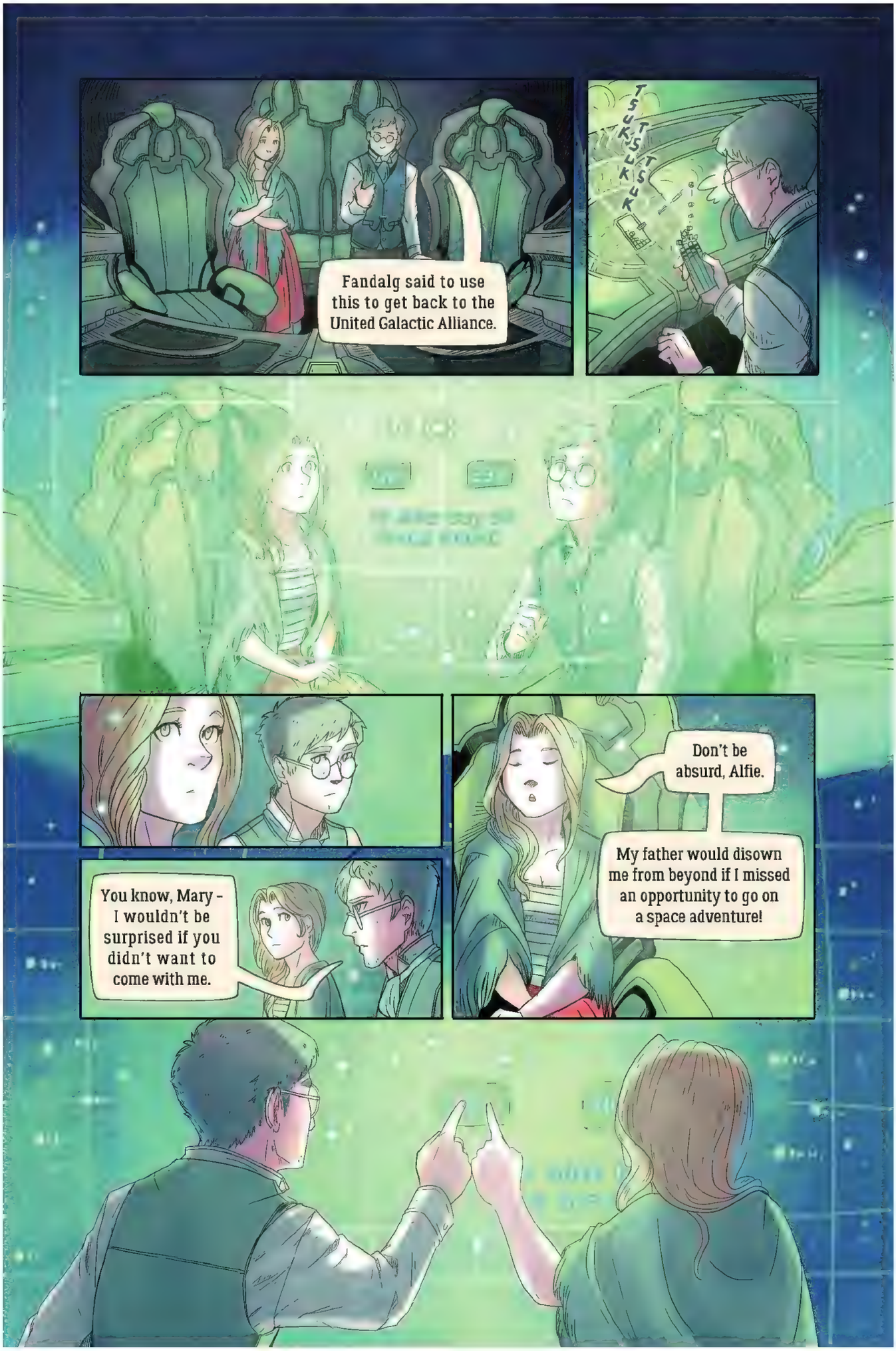
Fandalg said to use this to get back to the United Galactic Alliance.
TSUKSUKSUKSUKSUK
You know, Mary - I wouldn't be surprised if you didn't want to come with me.
Don't be absurd, Alfie.
My father would disown me from beyond if I missed an opportunity to go on a space adventure!

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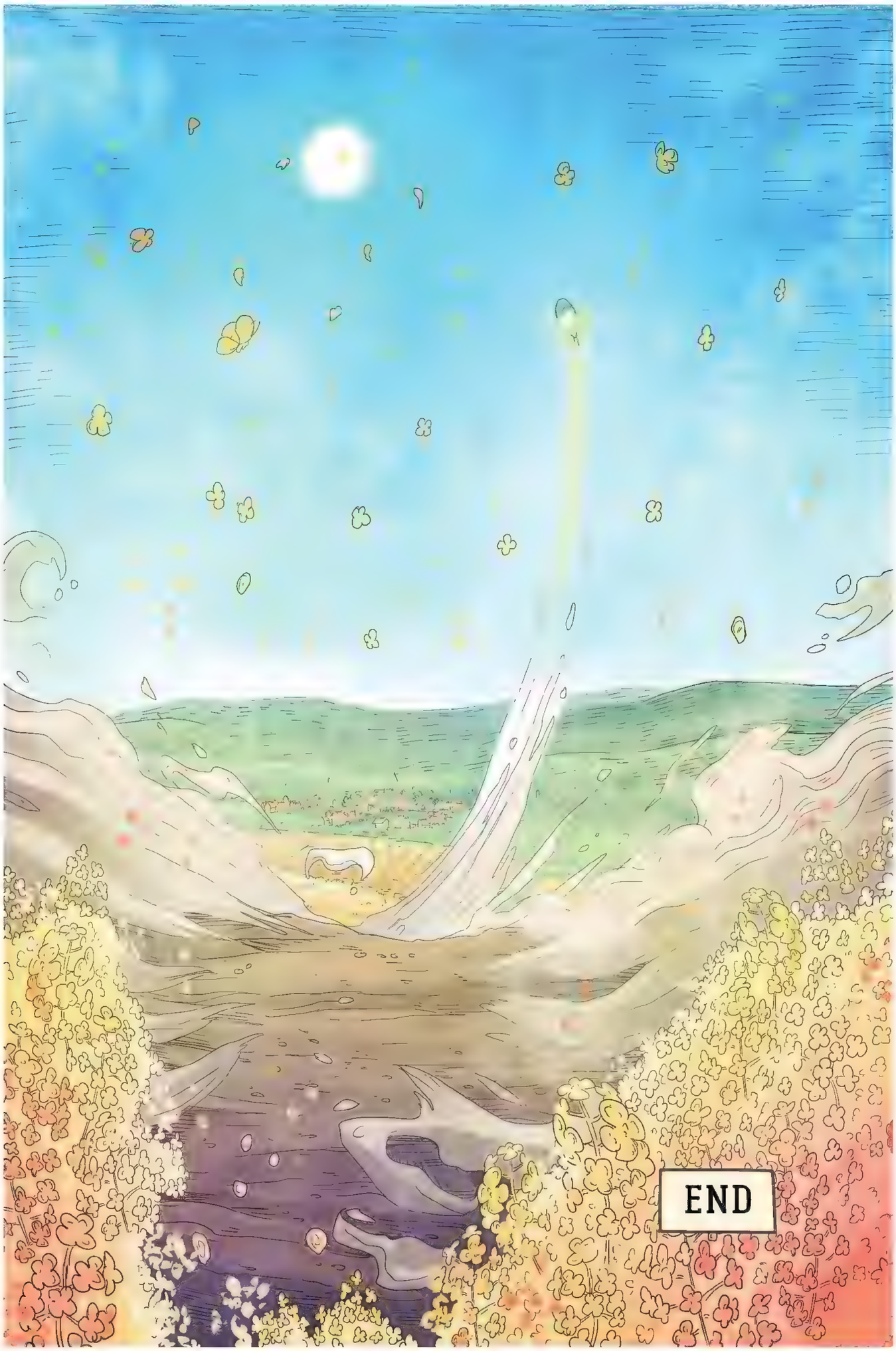

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SOCCER STRIPS

BY KEN REID

PART ONE

SO, WHEN THE WHISTLE BLEW...
RIGHT, MEN, LET'S SHOW 'EM SOME STYLE! COME ON, JUMP TO IT!
WE 'EAR AN' OBEY, MASTER!
YOUR WORD IS OUR COMMAND!
HUP-HUP!
HOPPITY-HOP!
JUMP
JUMP
HOP
IDIOTS! THEY'RE TAKIN' YOU LITERALLY! TELL THE FOOLS TO USE THEIR HEADS!
JIMMY JINKS SAYS "FOOLS, IDIOTS... USE YOUR 'EADS"!
OUR 'EADS! WE OBEY, GREAT ONE!
YOURS IS OUR COMMAND!
STREWTH! THEY'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG AGAIN! THEY SHOULD BE RUNNIN' CIRCLES ROUND THEIR OPPONENTS BY THIS TIME!
JIMMY JINKS SAYS "YER'VE GOT IT WRONG AGAIN! (GASP) YOU SHOULD BE RUNNIN' RINGS ROUND THE OPPOSITION!
HO, HO! CERTAINLY, MASTER.. 'ERE WE GO ROUND THE MULBERRY BUSH!
OH, NO! THIS WHOLE IDEA'S TURNED OUT A FIASCO!

On 14th January, 1969 Ken Reid received a call from Albert 'Cos' Cosser of Odhams Press, telling him that Fleetway was now in charge of Odhams Comics, and had decided to drop 'The Nervs' – the last strip he'd been drawing for the publisher. At the end of the conversation, Cos suggested that Ken contact Jack Le Grand at Fleetway about the future. Next day, Ken received a phone call from Mr. Le Grand himself, who wanted him to draw a soccer feature requiring caricatures of players. Ken had to decline because he thought he was unable to deal with that type of work, and he wasn't fond of the beautiful game in general. Besides, at that point, the rate of only £16 per page offered by Fleetway wasn't quite attractive, particularly in comparison with the £24 that he used to get from Odhams Press.

With very little paid work, and multiple unsuccessful attempts to sell new strip ideas to various publishers, most of 1969 was quite a disheartening period for Ken, and so another phone call from Fleetway in early November must have been very welcome. They repeated their request for one page per week, and Ken was no longer bothered by the fact that it was a soccer strip that they wanted him to draw.

The feature that marked the beginning of Ken's Fleetway career was called 'Sub' – the first of the eight soccer strips by him printed in SCORCHER comic between 1970 and 1974, with Sid Bicknell as Editor, and Steve Barker and David Hunt as Sub-editors. The paper offered a range of football-themed strips and illustrated text stories, articles about the big stars of the day, pictures of school football teams, and so on. Ken was offered the rate of seventeen pounds and ten schillings (£17-10-00 in pre-decimal currency, or £17.50)

per page for artwork and £3-10-00 for the script. The publisher provided scripts for the first two episodes, but all subsequent scripts (twenty-nine of them in all for the weeklies) were written by Ken, making 'Sub' the first of only two of Ken's Fleetway strips that he wrote scripts for (the other one was 'Faceache', which came a bit later).

SUB WENT TO THE DENTIST TO GET A FILL-IN FOR THE GAME!
SUB.
HE'S ALWAYS ON THE SIDELINES!
DUGGIE DRIBBLE WAS WITH THE DENTIST—FOR AN UNUSUAL FILLING...
ONCE AND FOR ALL, DRIBBLE, I CAN'T FILL YOUR FOOTBALL BLADDER WITH LAUGHING GAS UNDER THE NATIONAL HEALTH SCHEME! IS THAT CLEAR?
OKAY! TREAT MY FOOTBALL-BLADDER AS A "PRIVATE PATIENT"! I'LL PAY YOUR FEE!
DUGGIE LEFT THE DENTIST WITH A FOOTBALL FULL OF LAUGHING GAS—AND A WALLET FULL OF FRESH AIR...
HEH, HEH! NEVER MIND! IT WILL BE WORTH THE MONEY WHEN I GET A GAME ON SATURDAY!
I'LL SWAP THE REAL BALL FOR THIS ONE! I'VE WEAKENED THE CASING SO THAT IT WILL BURST WHEN IT'S KICKED. AND WHO-EVER KICKS IT WILL COLLAPSE—HELPLESS WITH MIRTHLESS HILARITY...!
...THEN I'LL BE CALLED ON AS SUB!
AND THAT SATURDAY AFTERNOON...
WHAT'S THAT LUMP ON YOUR BACK, DRIBBLE?
I THINK I'VE SLIPPED MY DISC! IT MUST BE ALL THE SITTING AROUND ON THIS BENCH EVERY WEEK THAT'S CAUSED IT!
HEH, HEH! THE MANAGER FELL FOR IT. NOW TO WAIT FOR SOME NIT TO MISS-KICK THE BALL THIS WAY AND SNAP FOOTBALLS!
HISSSS...
COME ON! NOW! SHOOT!
NO! DON'T!

The protagonist was a chubby lad named Duggie Dribble, who was the eternal substitute of Biggleswick Wanderers. Always on the sidelines, he hadn't played in a match for years and was willing to try all sorts of foul schemes and devious ploys to get himself off the bench and onto the pitch.

The idea of the strip was conceived by Fleetway who provided Ken with a rough layout of the first episode. Ken thought 'Sub' sounded plain and impersonal, so he bestowed the leading character with the name of Duggie Dribble, and renamed his team as the Biggleswick Wanderers (instead of United) to emphasise they didn't know where they were heading nor what they were doing half the time. In his letter addressed to Sid Bicknell, Ken noted that he wasn't well up on the rules of football, and jokingly urged the editor to make alterations if he found any jargon "relating to hockey or snooker".

Ken's 'Sub' scripts were neatly type-written and the artist kept second copies of the stories that he'd posted for the editor's approval. Upon receipt of a script, the editor would phone Ken to discuss any alterations that he thought were required. But playing it safe had become the motto of the day: the editor even instructed Ken to avoid phrases like "drop dead" in his scripts. Ken quickly got a grasp of what suited Sid Bicknell's palette, so normally his scripts were okayed without much comment, and what little changes were needed usually had to do with cutting down the number of panels.

The editor did, however, turn down one 'Sub' script. The story was called 'Ball Thief', and in it the manager posted Duggie to guard the spare equipment room because someone had been tampering with the lock. Crouched in hiding with a big round alarm bell in hand, Duggie 'bleats to Providence' (Ken's wording) to let the crook be a dwarf or pygmy who doesn't believe in violence. The thief proves to be a gigantic masked oaf who is terrified at being caught in the act. He admits that he only wanted to borrow a football because his dad could never afford to buy him one, and he's mad about the game. Duggie is delighted to oblige and they start playing soccer using the alarm bell as a football ("it's better'n nothing"). The ruckus wakes up the manager who rushes to the crime scene, accompanied by Police Constable Crumm. The burglar flees in panic and Duggie instinctively follows after him. A fortnight later they are still in a back street hideout; the burglar is so desperate he's ready to turn himself in, but Duggie refuses to let him go because he wants to have someone to play football with.

Ken spent a lot of time on his 'Sub' sets, as can be seen from detailed artwork that is easily on par with that of his Odhams period. It's a shame that the printers' presses sometimes failed to do it justice. 'Sub' began in the first issue of SCORCHER, cover-dated 10th January 1970, and continued for thirty-one weeks until the issue of 8th August, 1970. Ken was also asked to contribute two episodes for SCORCHER ANNUAL 1971 which came out for the Christmas of 1970, and two more for the first SCORCHER SUMMER SPECIAL published in 1970, including one drawn for colour and coloured in-house by Fleetway. Ken worked on 'Sub' for six months from November 1969 till 16th June 1970, when he posted the last episode.

Unfortunately, the period when Ken drew 'Sub' coincided with another loss of work. At the end of March 1970, he received news

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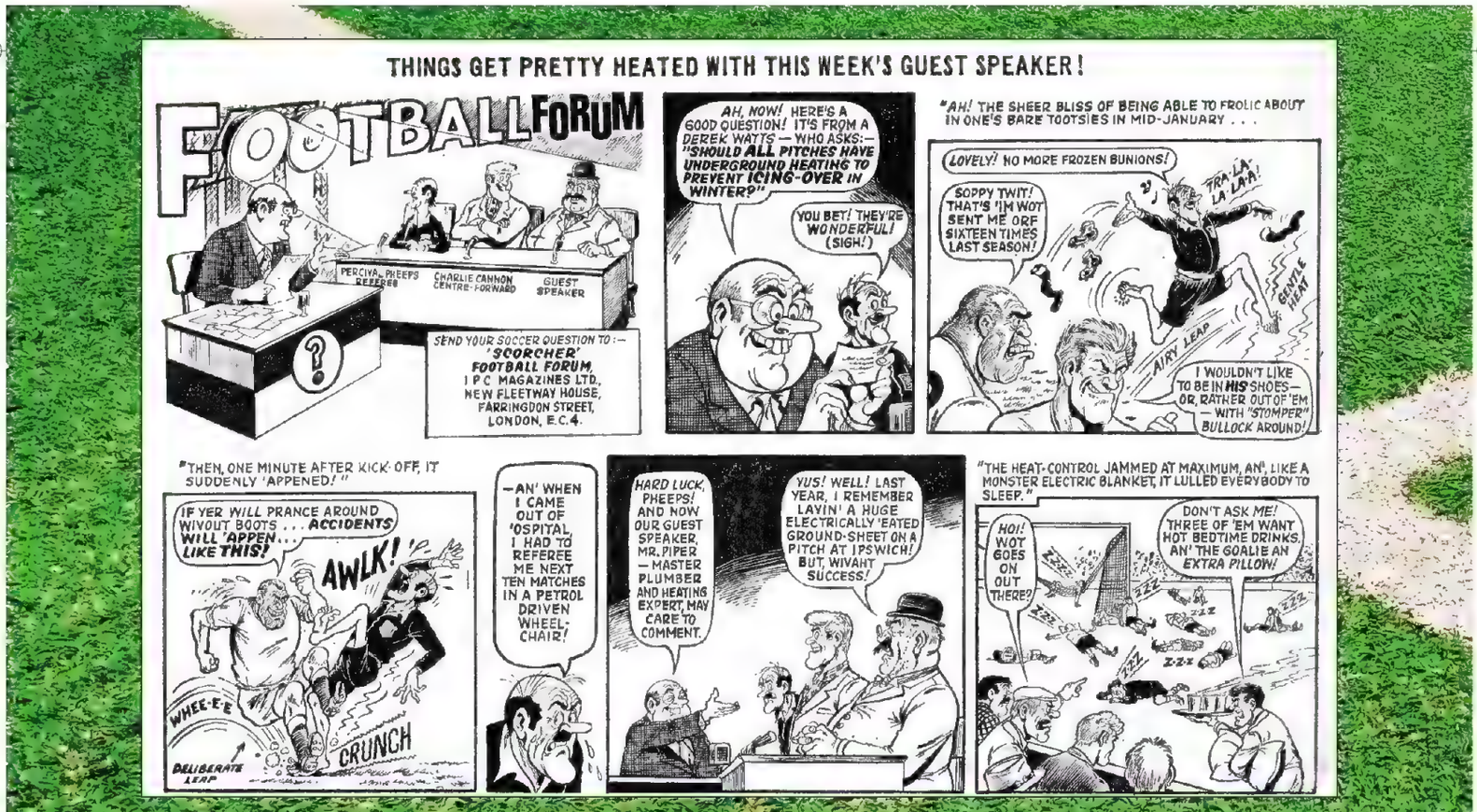
about the permanent cancellation of 'Titles' – his weekly feature in the Irish edition of the Sunday Express and the last in the long-running series of weekly competitions he'd been supplying to the paper regularly since 1956. This left Ken with only 'Sub' to draw for the time being. The loss of income from 'Titles' was partly compensated by the money which came from a new strip called 'Banger and Masher' for Fleetway's VALIANT comic. Ken started working on that in April 1970, drawing it from the scripts supplied by Walter Thorburn – his old collaborator from Odhams.

In April 1970 Sid Bicknell informed Ken that 'Sub' was to finish about September, and that he would be given another character to replace it with. The second soccer strip idea that the editorial team of SCORCHER came up with was 'Football Forum', and it had not just one leading character but a whole panel of them! It was a reader participation feature in which you could win £1 if you wrote in and asked a question for the panel of 'experts' to answer. The strip had a show host – the questionmaster Alf Blatt, and a panel consisting of the resident referee Percival Pheeps, the resident centre-forward Charlie Cannon, and a fresh guest speaker every week, including an ex-wrestler, a child psychiatrist, a master plumber, a meteorologist, a travel agent, a self-employed mousetrap maker and even Grannie Haddock (no doubt inspired by Fanny Cradock, a well-known TV cook at the time) who appeared in the show after hobbling into the wrong studio, to mention but a few. Questions ranged from being normal, such as 'What is the best way to take a penalty?', 'Is soccer becoming too dirty?' or 'Are football players over-paid', to those somewhat more ludicrous, e.g. 'Should goal keepers wear bonnets?' or 'Are fat players a disgrace to the game?' No matter what the question, the quibbling panel never failed to make a mess of things when providing their answer, and always caused pandemonium in the studio. It wasn't uncommon for the strip to end with the questionmaster uttering threats to the sender of that week's question and blaming him or her for the resulting ruckus.

Ken started drawing 'Football Forum' in the middle of June 1970, immediately after he finished working on 'Sub'. The arrangement was that scripts were to be provided by Fleetway, and Ken was to receive £17-10-00 for artwork. Starting with the eighth episode ('Double-vision specs' printed in SCORCHER, cover-dated 3rd October, 1970) Ken became dissatisfied with the scripts and took the trouble of re-writing some of them without pay.

Overall, 'Football Forum' comes across as a feature aimed at the grown-up reader, in that it is text-heavy and the humour is rather zany. Ken worked on the strip for five months, drawing a total of twenty-two one-page episodes, the last of which was posted off to London on 21st November, 1970. The run of 'Football Forum' started in SCORCHER, cover-dated 18th August, 1970 and ended on 16th January, 1971, missing the issue of 10th December, 1970 in the process. It was immediately succeeded by Ken's third soccer strip – 'Manager Matt'.

'Manager Matt' depicted the trials and tribulations of the beleaguered boss of Mudchester United, the worst-run football club in Britain. Realising they could not keep blaming their team's persistent losses on bad weather and the goalkeeper's lumbago, the board of directors decided they needed a scapegoat in the form of some pea-brained manager on whom they could pin the blame for the ghastly fact that the team consisted of eleven gibbering idiots. Manager Matt was an answer to their


THINGS GET PRETTY HEATED WITH THIS WEEK'S GUEST SPEAKER!
FOOTBALL FORUM
PERCIVAL PHEEPS REFEREE
CHARLIE CANNON CENTRE-FORWARD
GUEST SPEAKER
SEND YOUR SOCCER QUESTION TO:— 'SCORCHER' FOOTBALL FORUM, I.P.C. MAGAZINES LTD., NEW FLEETWAY HOUSE, FARRINGDON STREET, LONDON, E.C.4.
AH, NOW! HERE'S A GOOD QUESTION! IT'S FROM A DEREK WATTS — WHO ASKS:— "SHOULD ALL PITCHES HAVE UNDERGROUND HEATING TO PREVENT ICING-OVER IN WINTER?"
YOU BET! THEY'RE WONDERFUL! (SIGH!)
"AH! THE SHEER BLISS OF BEING ABLE TO FROLIC ABOUT IN ONE'S BARE TOOTSIES IN MID-JANUARY . . .
LOVELY! NO MORE FROZEN BUNIONS!
SOPPY TWIT! THAT'S 'IM WOT SENT ME ORF SIXTEEN TIMES LAST SEASON!
TRA-LA-LA-LA-LA!
GENTLE HEAT
AIRY LEAP
I WOULDN'T LIKE TO BE IN HIS SHOES— OR, RATHER OUT OF 'EM — WITH "STOMPER" BULLOCK AROUND!
"THEN, ONE MINUTE AFTER KICK-OFF, IT SUDDENLY 'APPENED!"
IF YER WILL PRANCE AROUND WIVOUT BOOTS . . . ACCIDENTS WILL 'APPEN . . . LIKE THIS!
AWLK!
WHEE-E-E
DELIBERATE LEAP
CRUNCH
—AN' WHEN I CAME OUT OF 'OSPITAL, I HAD TO REFEREE ME NEXT TEN MATCHES IN A PETROL DRIVEN WHEEL-CHAIR!
HARD LUCK, PHEEPS! AND NOW OUR GUEST SPEAKER, MR. PIPER — MASTER PLUMBER AND HEATING EXPERT, MAY CARE TO COMMENT.
YUS! WELL! LAST YEAR, I REMEMBER LAYIN' A HUGE ELECTRICALLY 'EATED GROUND-SHEET ON A PITCH AT IPSWICH! BUT, WIVAHT SUCCESS!
"THE HEAT-CONTROL JAMMED AT MAXIMUM, AN', LIKE A MONSTER ELECTRIC BLANKET, IT LULLED EVERYBODY TO SLEEP."
HOI! WOT GOES ON OUT THERE?
DON'T ASK ME! THREE OF 'EM WANT HOT BEDTIME DRINKS, AN' THE GOALIE AN EXTRA PILLOW!
Z-Z-Z

problems, and their only concern was that, just like the last six managers, the new one might emigrate on meeting the team. Their fears proved to be unwarranted because it turned out that the idiocy of the manager and the utter stupidity of the Mudchester eleven were a perfect match. After twenty weeks of craziness at their dilapidated home stadium and the odd away match, this gaggle of eleven goons led by a nutty manager set out for Europe to take part in the European Cup. Their wanderings took them to France, then Spain, after which they got lost in the Sahara Desert while trying to find Rome (finding it eventually), then arriving in the little state of Slobvia before making it to the Cup final, where they triumphed by accidentally incapacitating the real contestants – Ravioli Rovers and Munich Mashers. Manager Matt's trip home, with a sackful of trophies on his back, ended with a plane crashing on Mudchester United stadium, leaving Manager Matt and the Mudchester eleven jobless.

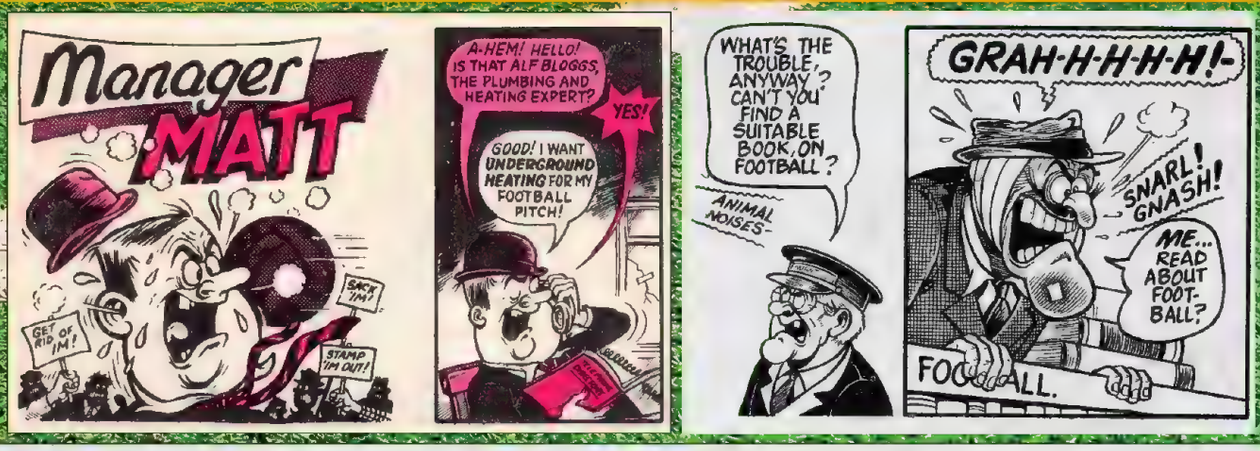
Ken worked on 'Manager Matt' from November 1970 till the middle of June 1971. The run consists of twenty-eight one-page episodes in the SCORCHER weeklies, starting from the issue cover-dated 23rd January, 1971, and concluding in the issue of 7th August, 1971 (by which time SCORCHER had absorbed SCORE and become SCORCHER AND SCORE), a two-page set in SCORCHER ANNUAL 1972 ('Stuck with Paint'), and another two-pager in the SCORCHER SUMMER SPECIAL 1971 ('Fight between Bands', in line and wash).

'Manager Matt' was succeeded by another fun character – the hilarious 'Hugh Fowler, the Man who Hates Football'. The by-line tells it all: Hugh Fowler was the ultimate, pathological anti-fan who would stop at nothing to sabotage a game. The root cause of his hatred for everything football was unclear – probably it was because Hugh couldn't play the game – but Hugh's anti-soccer campaign began in earnest when a football shattered his teeth and he had to get a new set in the opening episode. Although Hugh always ended up busted, he was relentless in his determination to stomp out the game, and each incident gave him an extra reason for hating football and coming up with more anti-football plots. He sometimes wondered whether it would be far less painful for him if he'd learn to love football, but it took him thirty-nine weeks to finally realise the error of his ways: in the last episode Hugh disguised himself as a footballer, had a bash at the game and enjoyed it so much that he joined United!

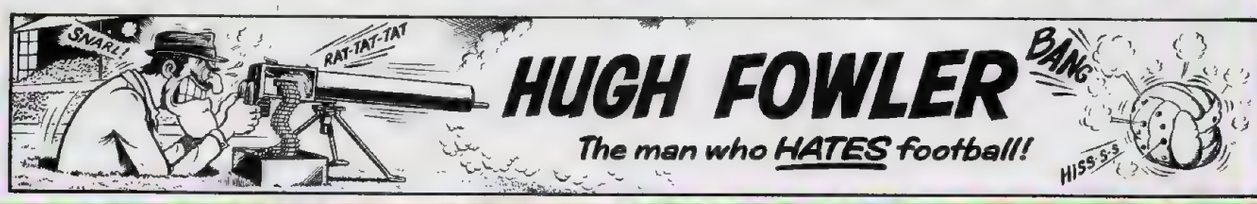
Ken worked on 'Hugh Fowler' from the middle of June 1971 until the end of March 1972. The run of the strip consists of thirty-nine episodes in the Scorcher and Score issues dated 14th August, 1971 to the 6th May, 1972, a double-pager in the Scorcher and Score HOLIDAY SPECIAL 1972 ('Going on Holiday – Mistaken for Player') and another in Scorcher ANNUAL 1973 ('Amusement Arcade'). Eight episodes in the weeklies were illustrated by another artist, which was necessitated by Ken's illness at the turn of the year. His failing health affected his productivity, and instead of contributing the usual four or five pages of soccer strips per month, Ken only managed three in November and three more in December. Furthermore, he had to undergo surgery and was unable to work throughout January 1972. Ken's recovery was marked by the first post-illness page posted on 30th January, 1972, and his drawing routine of one page of a soccer strip, and one page of 'Faceache' (script and artwork), soon got back on track.

To be Continued next issue...

"Hugh Fowler was the ultimate, pathological anti-fan who would stop at nothing to sabotage a game"


Manager MATT
GET RID OF 'IM!
SACK 'IM!
STAMP 'IM OUT!!
A-HEM! HELLO! IS THAT ALF BLOGGS, THE PLUMBING AND HEATING EXPERT?
YES!
GOOD! I WANT UNDERGROUND HEATING FOR MY FOOTBALL PITCH!
WHAT'S THE TROUBLE, ANYWAY? CAN'T YOU FIND A SUITABLE BOOK, ON FOOTBALL?
ANIMAL NOISES-
GRAH-H-H-H-H!-
SNARL! GNASH!
ME... READ ABOUT FOOT-BALL?
FOOTBALL.

LIKE POETRY IN MOTION — HUGH LED THE RIOT ACT IN THE LOCAL LIBRARY!



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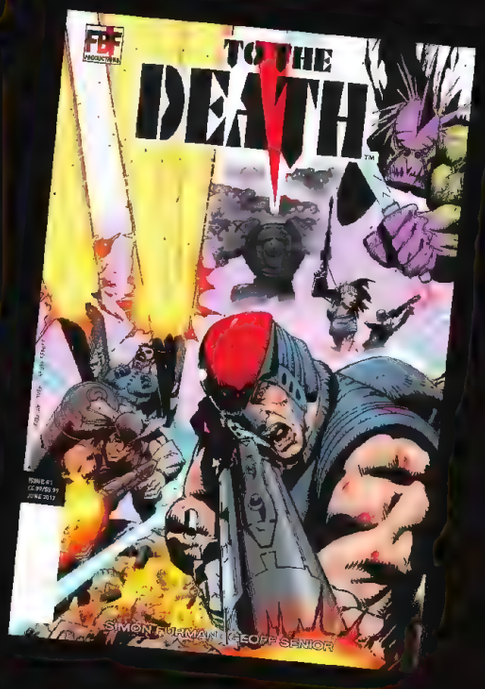

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Lady Flintlock - Chapter One, Epilogue

YOU COULD HAVE BEEN *KILLED* LAST NIGHT! YOU NEARLY *WERE!*
ARE YOU HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS? WE AGREED TO DO THIS - *TOGETHER!*
BUT I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD TURN OUT TO BE SO *DANGEROUS!*
PERHAPS WE NEED TO STOP THIS, MISS - IT'S *WRONG.*
AND OUR REASON FOR DOING THIS - IS *THAT* WRONG TOO?
MISS SARAH, I... I DIDN'T SAY THAT...
OH, LIZZIE! PLEASE DON'T TELL ME THAT YOU'RE STARTING TO *DOUBT* THE INTEGRITY OF OUR LITTLE INDULGENCE?
INDULGENCE? YOU'RE *ROBBING THE COACHES,* MISS! THEY CATCH YOU AND YOU'LL BE *HANGING* FROM THE *ROPE!*
WITH ME DANGLING ALONGSIDE YOU, MOST LIKELY!
SO WHY HAVEN'T YOU SPOKEN TO MY FATHER, AND LET HIM KNOW HOW I HAVE BEEN SPENDING MY NIGHTS?

NO! I'LL NOT TURN YOU IN, WHATEVER HAPPENS!
I SWEAR I'LL KEEP YOUR SECRET TO MY GRAVE!
TO BE CONTINUED...

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LADY FLINTLOCK POST EPILOGUE

So Lady Flintlock was Sarah Flintlock all along!

I hope you've been enjoying the serialisation of the first chapter of Lady Flintlock that's been running in Comic Scene over the past few issues. For me, seeing as one of the inspirations for Flintlock in the first place was the black and white adventure stories that were a mainstay of the weekly British comics of yesteryear, having the pages reproduced in a manner and size close to those has been an unexpected but enjoyable experience.

Unexpected? Why, yes, because very often in the British indie comics ghettoes you're working away from the mainstream, out of the spotlight and certainly not on the shelves of the high street newsagent and city centre comic shops. But Comic Scene does have that presence, and it has been terrific to see Lady Flintlock be part of its pages and for the character to hopefully have reached a much wider audience than I would have expected.

Enjoyable? Well, yes, in that I sincerely hope that if you've been reading the story so far you've found it worth your time in doing so. I hope also that you've found it a little bit different to what comics you usually encounter, and has perhaps provided an insight into what British indie comics can be if they're a part of our wonderful medium that you don't really see that much.

Because that's the rub. There are some brilliant indie comics being regularly published in the UK these days, but more often than not they won't be found in your comic shop and certainly not in WHS. There's the superb steampunk/horror/western hybrid of WesternNoir by Dave West and Gary Crutchley, the quirky and original NPC Tea by Sarah Millman, the bonkers lunacy of Moon by Steve Penfold. And so many, many more – including an ongoing anthology of adventures set entirely in the 18th Century that goes by the name of Flintlock.

Huge kudos to Comic Scene editor Tony Foster for giving some pages of Comic Scene over to some of the great UK indie comics throughout the summer issues. It's been great to see Captain Cosmic, Millford Green and other stories gracing the pages – but it's still barely scratched the surface.

There's an abundance of British comics out there, waiting for you to discover and enjoy them. Get to it!

(Oh, and if you have been enjoying Lady Flintlock you'll be pleased to know that the serialisation of Chapter Two will be coming to Comic Scene in the not too distant future!)

Steve Tanner,
Creator of Flintlock.

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CORKER!

TUNE IN TO TV COMIC!

Publishers of comics have always been on the lookout to reflect the interests of their readers and follow trends. Back in the 19th Century, the music hall comedian Dan Leno appeared in his own weekly entitled Dan Leno's Comic Journal. In 1920, The Amalgamated Press launched Film Fun featuring strips of the celluloid stars of the day, and in 1939 they followed it up with Radio Fun. It was inevitable that the relatively new phenomenon of television would provide good comic subject matter in the post-war years and in 1951 Beaverbrook (publishers of the News of the World) launched TV Comic.

In its early years, TV Comic was aimed at very young readers, with strips based on characters such as Muffin the Mule, Mr.Pastry, Sooty, Noddy, and suchlike. It was a kind of an intermediate comic between nursery comics and juvenile titles such as Dandy and Beano. It certainly looked impressive, with 8 of its 12 glossy pages in full colour at a time when many comics were printed on cheap newsprint with minimal colour.

By 1960, TV Comic had been "aged up" a little. Perhaps a clever move to retain its growing audience. Now aimed at the same age group as Beano and Dandy, it featured strips such as Popeye by Chick Henderson and The Lone Ranger by Mike Noble. It also included Four Feather Falls, a strip version of one of Gerry Anderson's earliest puppet series, with artwork by Neville Main. This artist was a regular on TV Comic, having drawn Muffin the Mule from issue 1. He'd later draw Fireball XL5, the early Doctor Who strips in 1964, have a long stint on Popeye, and contribute many other pages.

It was during this period when TV Comic's very own space hero appeared, created for the comic and not based on any TV show. Red Ray, Space Raynger was no doubt inspired by Eagle's Dan Dare, but although it didn't have the slick look of anything produced by the Frank Hampson studio, the art by Neville Main and Roland Davies gave it a quirky charm of its own.

Another regular TV Comic artist was Bill Mevin, who was skilled at drawing both humour and adventure strips. This earned him a busy schedule over the years drawing Lenny the Lion, Droopy, World Cup Willie, Space Patrol, Supercar, and many others. His Supercar strip, based on the Gerry Anderson series, had pride of place across the colour centre pages, whilst Neville Main's Fireball XL5 took up two pages in black and white. However, by 1965, TV Comic had lost their licence for Gerry Anderson material as rival comic TV Century 21 was born.

Every Monday
Week Ending 18th March, 1967
Number 79
6d
TV COMIC
DOCTOR WHO and the DALEKS
The Tardis whirls through time and space, nearing its unknown destination . . .
SOMETHING'S WRONG! THE TARDIS HAS ONLY HALF MATERIALIZED!
INSIDE..
WHAT ON EARTH'S UP? THE TARDIS REFUSES TO BECOME COMPLETELY SOLID — IT'S SEMI-TRANSPARENT!
I'VE NEVER KNOWN THIS HAPPEN BEFORE!
I SEEM TO RECALL SOMETHING SIMILAR A FEW CENTURIES AGO... I CAN'T QUITE REMEMBER WHAT CAUSED IT
I'VE GOT IT... IT'S TIME FOR THE TARDIS'S 500,000 MILE SERVICE

TV Century 21 also had the rights to run a strip starring The Daleks, which is why they never appeared in TV Comic's Doctor Who strip for the first few years. However, as soon as TV21's license expired, TV Comic was in there like a shot, promoting "Doctor Who and the Daleks" to the cover position. The series retained that title for a while even when the Daleks didn't appear!

FREE inside Dr Who Mighty Midget Comic!
NEW MIGHTY TV COMIC
9p
No.1 INSIDE A COMPLETE DR WHO COMIC... FREE!
A complete Dr WHO story plus a complete DALEK story!
*New story... STAR TREK
PLUS HAGAR
Next week... another Mighty Midget comic FREE! 16 packed pages of 'Star Trek'
PLUS POPEYE

The 1960s were the peak years for TV Comic. Now published by Polystyle, it offered an eclectic mix of characters including The Avengers, The Telegoons, Basil Brush, Ken Dodd's Diddymen, Bugs Bunny, Laurel and Hardy and more. Curiously, two of the most popular, and best remembered strips, Mighty Moth and TV Terrors, were not even TV characters!

Mighty Moth and his ongoing feud with "dad" ran for many years, as did TV Terrors, a bunch of autograph collectors trying to find their way past 'Hoppit' the doorman every week. Both strips had very simple concepts but the inventiveness of the creators kept them fresh. It made sense for TV Comic to include some originated strips like this, as it helped maintain the comic's identity and familiarity when the TV licensed strips reached the end of their contracts. Not that TV Comic was lacking an identity anyway. Its bright, glossy pages made it stand out in newsagents and its approach to humour was gentler than the more robust comics such as Wham! and Smash!

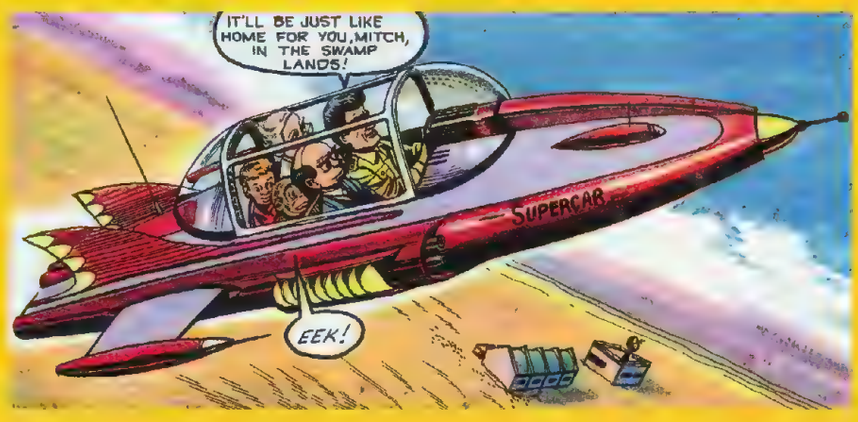
With issue No.909, dated 17th May 1969, Tom and Jerry arrived as the new cover strip replacing Ken Dodd's Diddymen. The MGM cartoons had been a fixture on television for a while, proving popular with a new generation of viewers. The strip in TV Comic, drawn by Bill Titcombe, contained slapstick and vitality and was a great representation of the cartoon. It proved popular enough to remain as the cover strip for seven years.

With issue No.1292, dated 18th September 1976, TV Comic was retitled Mighty TV Comic, and it became a 16 page tabloid comic (albeit folded in half to A4 for ease of display on the shelves). This radical overhaul gained it edited reprints of Gold Key's Star Trek strip from America, along with a few other reprints including Dik Browne's Hagar the Horrible. Several of the old favourites such as Popeye remained, but it seemed an odd move to turn TV Comic into a tabloid when that format had practically died out.

Although TV Comic switched back to its old title and format later, its glory days were gone. Not even the addition of a Kojak strip by a pre-V for Vendetta David Lloyd could save it. When celebrating its 1500th issue in 1980 its 16 pages on cheap paper made it look poor value compared to the standard 32 pages of comics such as Buster and Whoopee! Its slicker rival, Look-In, launched in 1971, had drawn away many of TV Comic's readers too. The end was inevitable.

TV Comic managed to survive another few years, but it eventually ended with No.1697, dated 29th June 1984. There was no announcement inside. The comic just never appeared again, although it did at least conclude its serials.

In its heyday, TV Comic was a bright, contemporary comic with its finger on the pulse. Its decline was sad to see, but its 33-year run was an impressive achievement and it was always an entertaining, fun comic!



Author: Lew Stringer | **Twitter:** @lewstringer | **Website:** lewstringer.com

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BATMAN 1989

'Winged freak, terrorises...? ***Wait 'til they get a load of me!'***

"Vronk!" "Zap!" "Kapow!!!"

Remember these sound effects from the Batman television show? Batman and his trusty ward Robin would hit the villains so hard that the sound effects would manifest themselves onscreen, and in glorious technicolour too. Well that was the problem with Batman, in that everyone who even thought of the Caped Crusader would automatically think of Adam West from the sixties show, and as great and high camp as the show was, outside of the comic reading members of society, that was what the public at large thought Batman was all about.

Batman eventually returned to his darker roots at the start of the seventies, thanks to the creative team of Denny O'Neill and Neal Adams. But this was in the comics. Fledgling film producer Michael Uslan, a lifelong comic, and in particular, Batman fan, needed to put some distance between the light-heartedness of the show and the public's interpretation of Batman. Unfortunately when he was gearing up to try and first get Gotham's guardian onto the big screen, it was 1979, and just like everyone else, film studios thought of Batman as something of a joke.

Uslan was turned away time and again. The road to the silver screen was a rocky one indeed, and it became a marathon more than a sprint. It wasn't until 1986 when Frank Miller and Lynn Varley's Dark Knight Returns burst onto the comic scene in such a dynamic way that got people's heads turning. At last, here was something that showed Batman's potential, and the thing is they hadn't has that far to search. All they had to do was pare back all the baggage that Batman had accrued in his history to that date and find the essence that made the character so readable in the first place.

After this, Miller created Batman Year One, in the Batman comics and there was no coming back from that. It told the definitive tale of Bruce Wayne's one man war on crime, and how he set about creating his dual identity of Batman.

It was clear, however that a new approach was needed for the cinema-going public to want to lay down their money and actually see this iteration of Batman. And looking back now, some thirty years since the film's release, it's easy to see how the

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film became a tent pole for every blockbuster movie that followed in its wake. 1989's Batman was not just a potential money-spinner, although that was obviously one of the plusses, this film had to be something altogether different. This wasn't just a film…it became an event!

Up and coming directors such as Joe Dante and Ivan Reitman were eager to get on-board the Batman train, yet the job finally went to relatively unknown Tim Burton. Burton originally worked at Disney, and his animated short, Frankenweenie put him on people's radar. Pee Wee's Big Adventure followed, but it was his off-the-wall horror comedy, Beetlejuice, which he made for Warners, the people who already owned the rights to the Batman, that clinched the deal for him.

The word on the street as the film started gearing up momentum was that camp was most definitely out. Grim and gritty, with a generous side salad of verisimilitude was in. Ok, so who was going to don the cowl and strike fear into Gotham's criminal underworld? Do they get a brand name, one that will ensure bums on seats, or go the same route as they did when Christopher Reeve was cast to play Batman's stablemate, Superman back in 1978? Rumours were rife that at one point Mel Gibson was attached to the part, but eventually it turned out he was unavailable due to commitments to the lethal Weapon franchise.

Also, they were considering comic actor Bill Murray for the part, but in the end the answer happened to be somewhere in between, and to say there was something of a backlash to Warner Bros choice by the fans is something of an understatement. Now you have to remember that this was years before the planet devouring monster that would come to be known as social media was even thought of. Warners were inundated with over 50,000 letters from outraged fans at the final choice, and the howl of derision was so loud that it made the cover of the Wall Street Journal in November of 1988. So much for free publicity!

And just who was the actor who was suddenly taking all the flack? Well it was Mr Mom himself…Michael Keaton.

The public at large couldn't make out whether this new Batman was going to be another knockabout affair like the TV show all those years before. Even producer Uslan thought that Burton's choice for Bruce Wayne was something of a, well, a joke! But when asked about why he had cast Keaton, Burton's reply was simple: All you had to do was look in Keaton's eyes to see that there was something going on underneath. Since he would be wearing a cowl to hide his features, the eyes had to be expressive, plus on top of that Keaton was a damn fine serious actor to boot.

But there was still tension in the camp as to the direction the film was taking. So the next question on everyone's lips was who the bad guy was going to be, and just who would be playing him. From Batman's eclectic Rogues Gallery there was only one foe he could really face off against, the yin to his yang, The Joker.

And there was only one name on the producer's and director's lips that could play the Clown Prince of Crime…Jack Nicholson. Producer Jon Peters had worked with Nicholson before on the Witches of Eastwick, and according to him he was the only actor for the role. Finally, Nicholson acquiesced, and now with his name attached the film, though still in pre-production, it gained a fair amount of gravitas, pretty much like Superman did when Marlon Brando added his considerable weight (no pun intended) to playing Kal El's father.

The next character to be cast was perhaps the biggest of all; Gotham City. If the world ever needed an enema, Gotham would be where they stuck the pipe! Forget the squeaky clean, sun kissed streets of glorious Gotham from the Adam West era; Burton's Gotham became the reason why Batman existed in the first place. Corrupt, depraved, and basically another name for Hell, Gotham had to look like no other city that had graced the silver screen before. Warners turned to production designer Anton Furst to bring a brooding menace to the bottomless steel and concrete canyons of Batman's hunting ground. Furst's Gotham felt savage, almost bestial, its cantilevered rooftops blocking out the sun and keeping its citizens in a shadow of perpetual fear.

And what's more, the place became a reality. Built on the spacious backlots of Pinewood Studios, the Gotham City set stretched for more than a quarter of a mile, at one point holding the title of the biggest practical film set ever built, even surpassing that of 1963's Cleopatra! With a crew of 200 craftsmen, it took only 5 months to complete the main street of Gotham. Rising two floors only, the effects of looming skyscrapers would later be achieved by the age old effect of matte paintings.

As stated before, the road to getting Batman to the big screen was a long and arduous one, taking ten years for the Dark Knight Detective to finally make it. But shooting the film took only three months through the winter of 1988, and that's including the Christmas break. There were plenty of script alterations as the shooting progressed, with many ideas abandoned altogether and at one point it's rumoured that they didn't even know how the film was going to end. You have to admire how cohesive the end result was considering the break neck schedule and constant script revisement.

All the while the shoot progressed through the cold winter nights on Pinewood's backlot; the marketing monster was getting up a head of steam, preparing for the summer of '89 release date. Anything and everything had the Bat logo stamped on it, from bubble bath to boxer shorts. It

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became a veritable tidal wave as Bat-Fever gripped the nation, and it wasn't just the kids scrambling to get their paws on the stuff.

The only other time something like this had been seen was back in 1977 and the release of a small film called Star Wars. But then it was the sudden popularity of the film which spawned the toy lines and other memorabilia that followed in its wake. And this was what made Star Wars creator George Lucas a very rich man indeed. Ultimately the difference between Lucas and Warners was that Lucas made a small film, not knowing it would capture the zeitgeist at the time, and in doing so ended up making a blockbuster.

Warners on the other hand were intentionally setting out to make a blockbuster from the get go.

But there was still a certain amount of negativity surrounding the production, so to quell people's fears Warners took the decision to put out a teaser trailer, a taster of what was to come. But they rushed it, and looking at the trailer now, some thirty years later it's safe to say that Warners got away with it by the skin of their teeth, as they lashed together what amounts to little more than a series of jump cuts, showing quick snippets of action and glimpses of a Bat shaped vigilante. The trailer didn't even have any music!

But it must have ticked all the right boxes for it whipped the fans into frenzy and left us all clamouring for more. A lot of my friends were ringing our local fleapit, asking the times of when the Batman trailer was being shown, and with what film, then going into the screening, seeing the trailer and leaving without staying to watch the film. At least I managed to stay and get my monies worth by sitting through the main feature. (For those of you out there who may be interested in knowing, it was Dirty Rotten Scoundrels, an apt choice of film as sixteen years later, Michael Caine would go on to portray Alfred Pennyworth, Batman's very own Batman.)

Music duties finally went to Danny Elfman who had worked with Burton on two previous occasions, and his gothic overtures leant an off kilter mood to the proceedings, though the rousing main hero theme roared with ominous gusto, providing an ambience of mood and mystery. Prince supplied a full soundtrack of songs to accompany the musical themes, which sold by the bucket load. And it was pure coincidence that he was already under the Warner label!

Music with dark overtones is all well and good, but would Batman himself reflect the change in mood? Well the answer was a big fat yes, with Michael Keaton donning an all-black muscle suit designed by costume designer Bob Ringwood. The body suit was made of Lycra with a foamed muscle cast glued over the top giving the idea of armoured protection. Gone were the garish colours of the Adam West era; gone were the underpants on the outside of the tights.

In its place was a black shadow that seemingly absorbed the light, a pillar of muscled darkness capped off by a demonic cowl with long Bats ears, capable of instilling fear into evildoers everywhere. Cloaked in wings of ebony, Batman was well and truly back where he belonged; in the shadows.

As effective as the suit was, it had the unfortunate and rather negative effect on the actor underneath, which only helped him get into character, but in an altogether unusual way. For starters it limited Keaton's body movements, so much so that when the cowl was bolted into place, he couldn't even turn his head, having to twist from the waist to look to his left and right. It ended up being called the "Bat-turn," and while it looks dramatic it turned out to be a pain in the Bat-posterior.

At the same time, the cowl made Mr Keaton practically deaf, adding to an increasing sense of claustrophobia since the cowl limited his peripheral vision too. Keaton later said that in order to cope with the restrictions of the Bat-suit, it left him with no other choice than to channel his emotions inwards, and this gave us a focussed, almost obsessed Dark Knight.

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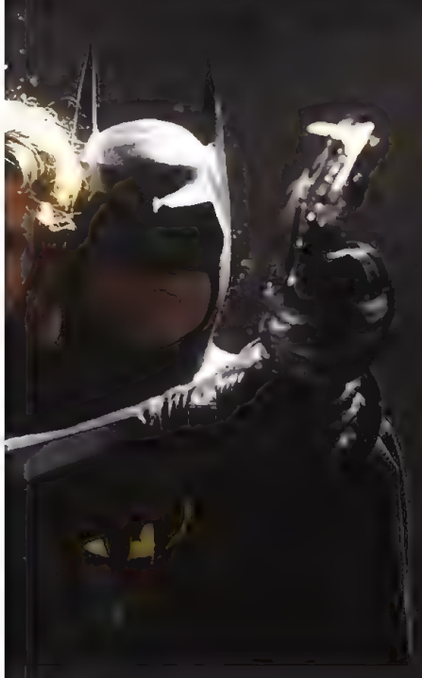
"Warners had splurged a **huge budget** for this production, sparing **no expense**, and it was all up on the screen for all to see"

All the gadgetry that comes with Batman's formidable arsenal had to be practically made, so they turned to John Evans, who has previously worked on such films as the James Bond Movies, as well as Raiders of the Lost Ark. Ninja wheels, Batarangs, and a multi-purpose speargun for ensnaring criminals or allowing Batman to scale the sides of buildings all had to work in the physical world, as did Joker's assortment of acid squirting paraphernalia. And so well made were they by Evans and his crew that they gave the belief that each item actually worked. You have to remember that this was long before all the computerised imaging and effects the directors and technicians of today have at their fingertips.

Action films of this nature always relied on model work for certain sequences, and modelling effects guru Derek Meddings fashioned in miniature scale Batman's various vehicles, including the Batwing which soared through the canyons of Gotham near the film's explosive finale. Meddings, a veteran of such cult British shows as Stingray and Thunderbirds was more than up to the task of making it all so realistic. And of course where Batman goes, so does the Batmobile, and working from Anton Furst's designs, John Evan's team created a car that any man, whether he was a Bat fan or not, would give their eye teeth to own.



Created by a team of 12 technicians in a record breaking 3 months, the end was result was a sleek battering ram of a car with Bat fins on the back to add to the brooding menace it exuded, and it was stocked to the gills with added extras that puts Batman's famed utility belt to shame. The vehicle seemed to be an extension of the crime fighting vigilante, as Furst outdid himself by giving it a timeless quality, and clocking in at a whopping 20 feet in length, and being 8 feet wide, this Batmobile had only one thing on its mechanical mind; intimidation.

Warners had splurged a huge budget for this production, sparing no expense, and it was all up on the screen for all to see, and it seemed that their idea of spending money in order to make money paid off or them in spades.

And so the summer of '89 was soon with us, though we Bat-Fans in the UK had to wait a little longer than the US, who got to see the film almost two full months before us. But August 11th finally arrived, and I, just like everyone else, stood in line, (which was practically half way down the high street!) to get to see the Dark Knight on the big screen for the first time.

And was it worth waiting for?

Hell yes. Nothing like it had quite been seen before, and in many ways it set the standard for all super hero films to follow. It was incredibly successful for Warners, and indeed for all involved in the production, both in front and behind the cameras.

Story wise it's a little weak, and there are a few inconsistencies in there that irk the Bat-Fans, and yes that does include me. For instance, if trusted Butler Alfred, played devilishly straight by Michael Gough, had shown Kim Basinger's Vicki Vale into the Batcave, he'd have been picking up his P45 the next morning!

And don't get me started on a young Jack Napier (Joker's civilian identity) killing Bruce Wayne's parents, thereby creating Batman in the first place, and later Batman not being able to save an adult Napier into falling into the toxic waste, only to emerge as the Joker!

Did I just give the plot away? I think it's safe to say that after thirty years pretty much anyone who wants to see it...has. And here's the difference between Batman and other so called blockbusters of the day; if, for example you take a film like Back to the Future, it stuck

around in cinemas for months, generating its grosses and cult status by sheer perseverance and being a damn fine film into the bargain. Batman was here and gone in a flash, making a gazillion Dollars in no time at all then disappearing from cinemas like a shadow in the night. No film had really done this before in such a way, and this was seemingly the way to go for all the big film studios.

And seeing the successes of the Batman film, Warners competitors, realising there was life in these colourfully clad characters from the silly books, all started shouting, "Where can I get me one of those?"

And as we all know now, Superhero films have gone from strength to strength. Whether they have the legs to last the course remains to be seen. All film genres go through cycles of being in vogue, whether it's Westerns or Crime films, the public only take so much before becoming bored and wanting something fresh to cleanse the cinematic palate. But one thing is certain, in that way back in 1989, Tim Burton's Batman started all ball rolling, how long that ball can keep up its momentum remains to be seen. But remember, all you have to do is shine the signal in the sky from atop Gotham Police headquarters, and rest assured that the Batman will always return...

Author: Martin Dallard | **Twitter:** @MartinDallard

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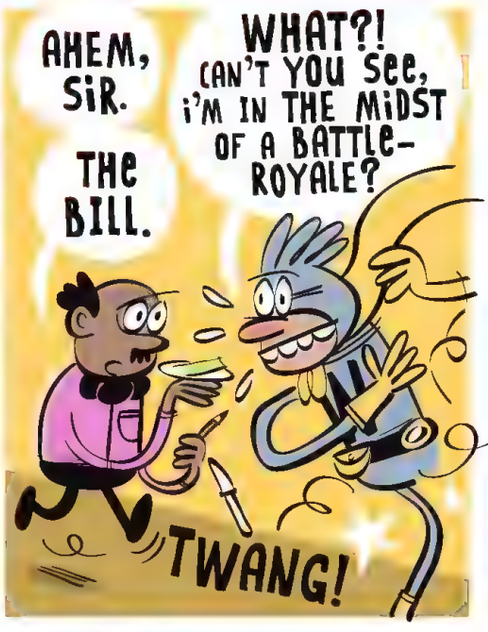
WHACKOMAN!

BY MARC JACKSON

SEEMINGLY ON A DATE WITH A RESPECTABLE LADY, WHACKOMAN FINDS HIMSELF A PARTNER IN CRIME WITH SHEILA THE STEALER!...



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THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

"Our aim is to nurture new talent & bring new voices to indie comics"

Alex Thomas takes a look at the team from **Good Comics**

For our latest profile of essential UK small press publishers, we turn our attention to the folk at Good Comics.

Launched in 2015 by Paddy Johnston and Sam Williams (then joined by Rozi Hathaway in 2018), Good Comics started life with the first issue of the Dead Singers Society zine. Since those early days, they have developed from zine publishers to releasing their own books, as well as representing UK and international talent. They've also kept true to their zine roots, with the Good Zines imprint. Their aim is to "nurture new talent and bring new voices to the community of independent comics", which we think they do brilliantly, so here are 4 titles which help to reinforce that inclusive and diverse message:

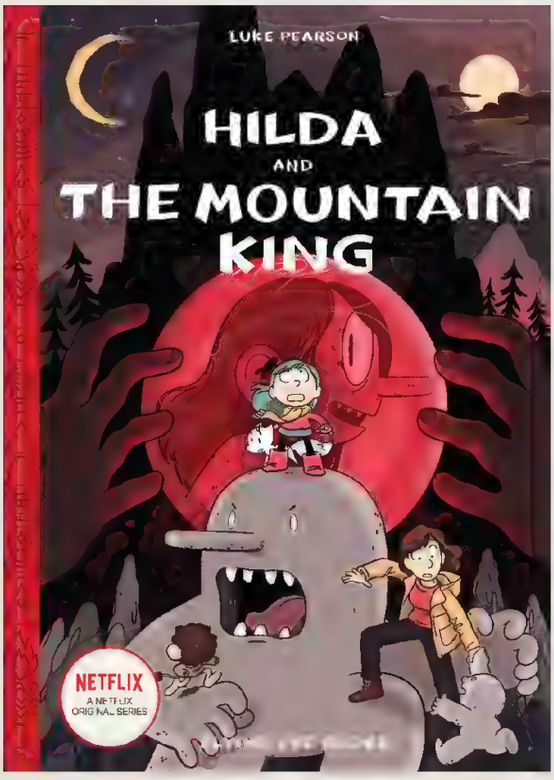
Dead Singers Society
The series which started it all, is a collection of stories from a variety of creators that pay homage to dead pop stars. Subjects range from the mainstream like Ian Dury or Amy Winehouse to more esoteric like Elliot Smith. A mix of strips and long form articles it features a variety of artists which makes this a really fascinating, if slightly macabre read.

You can purchase all these and more from www.goodcomics.co.uk/bookstore

Human Garbage by Joshua Hicks
As well as releasing his Glorious Wrestling Alliance books, Good Comics brought us this fantastic collection of previously published work from cartoonist Josh Hicks. It includes a fun mix of pulpy detective stories, personal reflections and silly one shotes, which are all laced with bags of Josh's brilliant sense of humour.

The Times I Knew I Was Gay by Eleanor Crewes
Perhaps the most accomplished Good Comics title to date. Eleanor Crewes' high personal account of how she discovered her sexuality throughout her teens and early twenties, is told in a really thoughtful and considered way. Instead of relying on one key moment, it is more of a trickle effect that sees her come to her realization gradually. The natural style and compelling tone of voice sees her tell her highly personal story in an almost diary like style, and so makes this is a brave and important work.

Petrichor by Gareth A Hopkins
When it comes to pushing the boundaries of what comics really are, then there aren't many creators who push things as far as Gareth Hopkins. His unique brand of abstract comics use collage and mixed media to create pages that look like out of control Rorschach images, but these images are backed up with snippets of dialogue which repeat hypnotically to give the whole thing a wonderfully surreal yet completely absorbing tone that really is one of a kind.



Hilda and the Mountain King

Publisher: Flying Eye Books
Writer/Artist: Luke Pearson
Price: £16.99 from nobrow.net

For the past few years, Luke Pearson's Hilda books have been a hidden gem within the comics world, that only an enlightened few seemed to be aware of. However with our favourite blue haired troll botherer now having a hit animated series on Netflix, it seem that the whole world is getting in on the act. And so what better time for Pearson to release a new volume of Scandi scampery.

For those not in the know, Hilda is a young girl who lives with her mother, and half deer half fox pet Twig, in the city of Trollberg (which is a kind of contemporary Scandi city filled with mystical creatures). At the end of the last volume (Hilda and the Stone Forest), she found herself turned into a troll and whisked from her home back to the troll forest. This new volume picks up the action immediately after this switch and sees Hilda attempting to escape the mountain kingdom and return home to her mother. While her bewildered Mum attempts to cope with a baby troll now living in her house.

While Hilda books all have this relentless energy and enthusiasm for life, Hilda and The Mountain King is backed up with a real emotional depth, thanks to the glorious relationship between Hilda and her mother. While in previous volumes this has been strained (as her mother attempted to curb her daughter's more outrageous antics) the realisation that neither can manage without the other really tugs at the heart strings. Which gives Hilda and the Mountain King one of the most wonderful emotional cores that any of the Hilda books have managed so far.

"Densely panelled pages make every spread a glorious and frenetic delight that draws you in"

Alongside this wonderful relationship is the usual incredible artwork and glorious characterisation that we have come to know and love with the Hilda books. The characters are top drawer, especially the bizarre trolls and craggy mountain king. Pearson's style evokes memories of classic Scandi books like the Moomins, along with the expressive style of European comics and the wistfulness of a Studio Ghibli animation. It is also dripping with contemporary cool thanks to a paired back colour scheme which make it feel like the ultimate in hipster comic book chic.

Pearson's' densely panelled pages make every spread a glorious and frenetic delight that draws you into Hilda's world effortlessly and once you are in you won't ever want to escape. Hilda and The Mountain Kind is another slice of comic perfection, and if this is your first journey to the world of Trollberg, then it won't be your last! **AT**

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Internet Crusader

Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: George Wylesole
Price: £14.99 from averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com

For his follow up to last year's Ghosts Etc. cartoonist George Wylesole begins with a series of pages that look like screengrabs from a 90s computer desktop, but which have been meticulously redrawn. It's full of pop up ads, chat screens and vintage icons which will make geeks of a certain age swell with nostalgia.

After a few pages, you begin to see a story is playing out in the chat windows and email subject fields, which follows a geeky teen getting hacked after trying to download something he shouldn't and gets more than he bargained for - as do his family and friends in the real world!

Thanks to this unique approach to story telling, Internet Crusader is unlike anything else you'll read this year. While that originality makes for an incredible experience, it's not always an easy read. The pages are quite over whelming in places, which gets even more intense when the virus hits and takes over. Fortunately a mid issue video game challenge sees Wylesole break things up and deliver a brilliant mix of vintage visuals and more obvious action.

We often say books deserve multiple readings but in Internet Crusader's case it is imperative, as it's likely you won't really get to grips with the story until half way through. So revisiting those early pages is essential in order to make sense of what is going on.

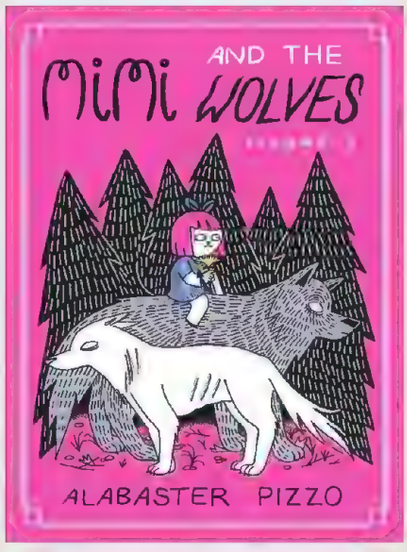
When you've finally got your head around it, Internet Crusader is a fantastically complex and uniquely original read, that really pushes the boundaries of sequential story telling. And will make you never want to talk to a mystery Instant Messenger again! **AT**

Mimi and The Wolves

Publisher: Avery Hill Publishing
Writer/Artist: Alabaster Pizzo
Price: £14.99 from averyhillpublishing.bigcartel.com

Collecting together the first 3 volumes of Alabaster Pizzo's acclaimed self published series, Mimi and The Wolves sees a young mouse get mixed up in a dark world of wolves and the occult, after being plagued by mysterious dream about the enigmatic Holy Venus.

On the surface, Mimi And The Wolves looks like a fun mix of cutesy animal comic and supernatural mythology, thanks to Pizzo's sublimely simple artwork. But underneath that facade is an epic slow burning story of self discovery, that juxtaposes the adorable world of Mimi with the darker elements of the wolves' – especially their rituals, carnivorous ways and the toxic relationships they expect Mimi to accept. With it's central theme of a doomed journey of self discovery, it's a book that can be read in a number of ways, depending on your own life experiences. But overall it's another fascinating and thought provoking read from Avery Hill that is a lot more substantial than it's cute exterior would suggest. **AT**



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Vanni

Publisher: New Internationalist
Writer: Benjamin Dix
Artist: Lindsay Pollock
Price: £16.59 from Amazon

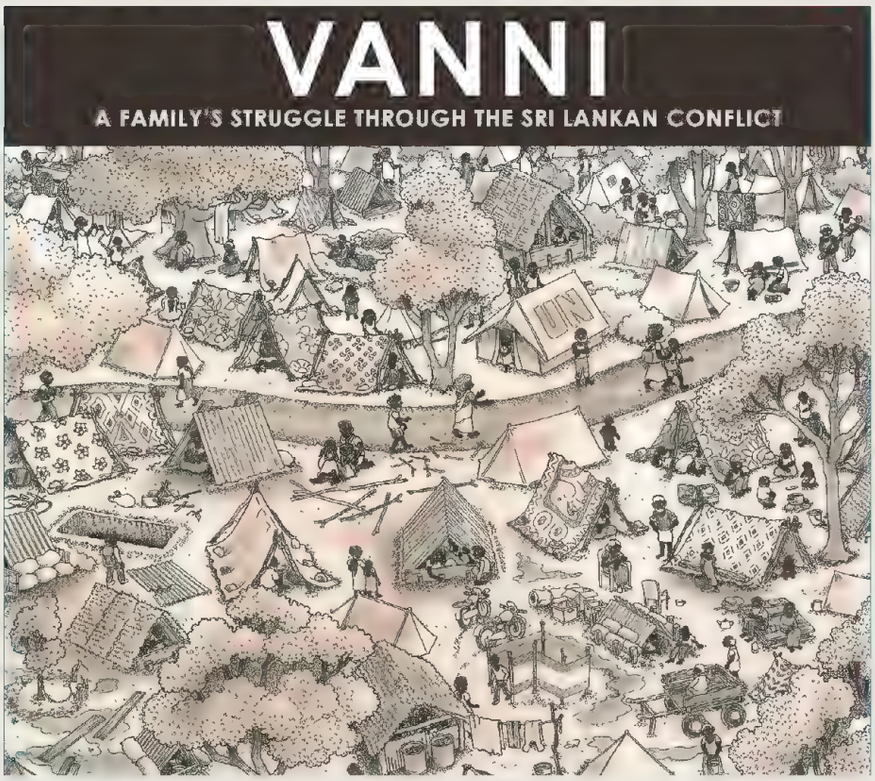
A powerful graphic novel which looks at the civil war in Sri Lanka that occurred in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. It follows two families as they attempt to survive in their devastated homeland, moving from camp to camp where they are supposed to be safe, but losing family and friends along the way - some to bullets and bombs, others to enforced recruitment into the army.

Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollack's graphic novel is a potent and emotive look at the affect modern warfare has on the population of the country in which war is fought. While the story is not a 'true story' it is an amalgamation of accounts which Dix collected during his time working for the UN and interviews with those who survived and sought refuge in the UK and beyond.

By combining all these elements into one account, it allows Dix and Pollack to tell a very deliberate, detail heavy story, in which they get across the points they need to about the atrocities these people went through. But also they are able to build well rounded characters with believable relationships which make you care about what they go through.

While Dix handles the story with subtlety and intelligence, Pollack's artwork brings the story to life thanks to a sublime mix of pencil line and grey watercolour washes. The greyscale colour scheme does a wonderful job of balancing the personal moments with the horrors of war and the devastation of the tsunami without relying on an obvious colour palette.

While the Sri Lankan Civil war may not be on everyone's radar Vanni is the kind of graphic novel which brings attention to it in a very accessible and impactful way. A thought-provoking and beautifully told story, this is an extraordinary piece of work that deserves the utmost praise! **AT**



Delver

Publisher: Comixology Originals
Writer: MK Reed, C. Spike Trotman,
Artist: Clive Hawken
Price: £1.99/$2.99 at Comixology

The latest from ComiXology's Originals stable tells the story of a young girl whose simple farming life changes forever when her family discovers a magic door leading to mysterious dungeon, which brings with it treasure hunting 'Delvers'.

With her home being misused by these visitors, our heroine sets off into the dungeon in search of riches to save her family. All of which makes for a really interesting premise for a story, but one with a relatively slow pace in the opening issues.

Once the story gets going, and we enter the dungeon, things pick up, and our heroine Temerity develops from being a fairly blank slate into an embittered soul aggrieved by what is happening to her home - especially it's misuse by unwanted visitors and it's corruption by magic. This makes the character very relate-able, in a way not often seen in fantasy comics and make for a really engaging read as a result.

Packed full of colourful characters, bizarre creatures and light-hearted adventure, Delver is a series which is definitely worth digging into. **JB**

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"I always think: how can I make The Artist's life more horrible?"

Anna Haifisch on her motivation for **The Artist: The Circle of Life**

Anna Haifisch's comic strip The Artist, has become a small press favourite thanks to its series of evocative stories about a suffering for your art. She is back with a new collection of strips, starring her bird like muse, and we asked her what we can look forward to in The Artist: Circle of Life:

THE ARTIST
THE CIRCLE OF LIFE
BREAKDOWN PRESS
STROBE LIGHT, BLINK B-B-BLINK BLINK
I FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY ROOFIED MY DRINK D-D-DRINK DRINK
DANCE FLOOR POLITICS ASSES OUT ASSES OUT
I'VE GOT THE WHOLE NIGHT TO SPREAD MY CHARME AND TALENT!
SO ALL YOU OWL!!
WHAT KIND OF SHAMPOO ARE YOU USING, OWL?
HERBAL ESSENCES BLOWOUT SMOOTH
LOOK, I GOTTA GO...
HHHH .. SUCH NICE AND SMOOTH FEATHERS.

As well as seeing the artist suffer in the fine art world he also struggles in small press

You're releasing a new collection of The Artist - has the character changed or evolved?
Anna Haifisch: Not yet! He is going to be very successful in the 3rd volume. I am working on it right now. But for the 2nd book he didn't change much. It's only his hair which he grew out. He is the same miserable artist as he is in the first book. There are just more awful things happening to him.

The strips feel quite personal, are they based on your own experiences of being a struggling artist?
AF: None of the episodes are autobiographic. Some of the stories are taken from my own or my friends' experiences. But I am exaggerating a lot while I am writing and drawing the episodes. I always think: how can I make The Artist's life more horrible? Often I feel like a sadist, because I love him a lot.

Why did you choose to represent the artist as a bird?
AF: I wanted the character to be fragile and frail. Birds are both. His father is a crane and his mother is a swan. Both are birds with long limbs. That makes The Artist extremely flexible and bendable. It's fun to draw him.

What inspired you to start telling stories about a struggling artist?
AF: I often find drama amusing. And being an artist is quite dramatic. It is the perfect breeding ground for stories that are funny and sad at the same time. Also I love to play around with old fashioned artist myths.

Do you find your comics appeal to fellow artists who recognise their own struggles in the stories?
AF: When the series was weekly on Vice.com I got a lot of responses from readers who found themselves in his place or who wanted to give him a meal. I think lots of them weren't artists themselves. The feeling of being a failure seems to be universal.

You seem to give the character a sense of optimism is it important to add some humour to the book?
AF: Oh, of course! I don't want to depress anybody. Also being an artist can be very great, despite economic threats. I really don't want to keep anybody away from choosing this path. I think that every good or even sad story needs a bit of humour in it. That's my duty as the creator.

The Artist: Circle of Life is available for £16.99 from Breakdown Press

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Test #1-3

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: Christopher Sebela
Artist: Jen Hickman, Harry Saxon, Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou
Price: £2.49 from ComiXology

The latest from High Crimes' Christopher Sebela is a cyberpunk mystery that follows a technologically altered young woman on a search for meaning in the mysterious town of Laurelwood.

Test is a book that is built around questions. From the moment we meet our heroine Aleph in the front of the cab of a truck as she hitch-hikes across the US in search of a high tech shangi-la, we are questioning who she is, where she is going and what this world is all about.

The characters' constant searching for answers in Test is an interesting way to tell a story and certainly works well for the genre. The concept of 'a girl with a secret' goes to a 'small American town, with an even bigger secret' is one we've seen plenty of times before, reminding us of Psycho and Twin Peaks but also The Prisoner. It also has a very Warren Ellis feel with its use of forward thinking technology that interacts with the human body.

A bit like its Vault Comics stable-mate, Friendo, Test is a book which is going to require time and effort to really get into. It's an ambitious story, packed full of clever ideas and told in a really interesting way, however it is not one which gives immediate gratification or resolution. We are only just beginning to get a glimpse of what is happening, but based on these first issues Test is a book worth trying out. **AT**

Resonant

Publisher: Vault Comics
Writer: David Andry
Artist: Alejandro Aragon
Price: £2.49 at Comixology

Also joining the ever expanding Vault Comics roster is Resonant, the story of a young girl's mission to protect her siblings while their father, , travels for help in a deadly future.

Writer, David Andry has produced a stellar story that is immensely engrossing as you find yourself struggling to put it down, thanks to the incredible levels of thought put into every aspect of this tale and the world it inhabits. From the incredibly realistic family dynamic to the mysterious Chirpers and the rules surrounding the mysterious waves, reading, Resonant feels like a cross between many of the best apocalyptic comics (especially the Walking Dead), however, this in no way a cheap knock off. Andry has imbued the title with so much heart and mystery that it stand on it's own.

The artistic team of Alejandro Aragon, Jason Wordie and Deron Bennett offer equally impressive work to enhance this wonderful title. Aragon's scratchy and expressive artwork really conveys a lot of the story in a very unique fashion, while the colours and lettering help it to create a really unique vibe.

This is another future classic from Vault, as Andry and co. fill this book with a deep sense of intrigue and beauty which quickly becomes horrific and terrifying. But either way will be incredibly captivating for readers, who'll be wanting more by the end. **JB**

Warpaint

Publisher: Witchworld Limited
Writer: Kev Sherry
Artist: Katia Vecchio
Price: £5.49 from ComiXology

Warpaint reads like a classic Stephen King coming-of-age story or a John Hughes brat pack movie, but set in the modern day with female leads.

It follows the trials and tribulations of a group of young school girls who come into conflict with the school bully and an out of touch teacher and decide to make their point in a most unlikely manner - by using their menstrual blood as warpaint.

Writer Sherry and artist Vecchio have created a smartly conceieved and thought provoking read about young women finding their place in the world. While it uses classic coming of age conventions, it also mixes in some supernatural elements alongside very believable and relate-able characters to make a really compelling story.

At it's core is firebrand Selene the best friend you wish you had at school, until they go too far and lead you astray.

While it may be a challenging read for some, this is a really powerful comic that should inspire young people everywhere. **AT**

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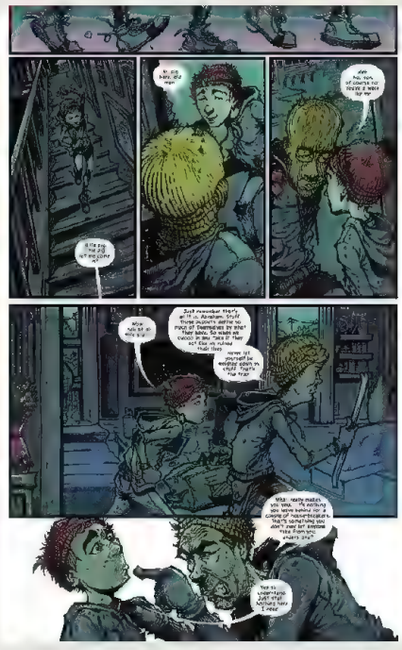
"It's a story that's going to pull the rug out from under readers' feet at multiple points"

John Lees on the mysteries behind new IDW series **Mountainhead**

Part of a series of exciting creator owned series from IDW Publishing, comes Mountainhead, by Sink writer John Lees and artist Ryan Lee. With it's mix of horror and mystery, we caught up with John to find out more about the meaning behind his multi-faceted new series:

Tell us a bit about the world of Mountainhead and what inspired it?
John Lees: The story was drawn together from various elements. The character of Abraham Stubbs has been in my head for years, right down to his name. I drew from a couple of real-life stories that had a big impact on me, and combined them with some original elements to create this conflicted young man and his father, Noah. But while the character felt rich and alive to me, I didn't have a suitably compelling story to use him in, and so the concept went on the shelf.

Later, I developed the story of the town of Braeriach and the mysterious events that unfold there, and thought it could make for a visually striking narrative. But the story felt hollow because it wasn't anchored in character, the characters I had feeling merely like vehicles driven by the plot than fully-formed figures. And then I remembered Abraham on the shelf, a character without a story to go with my story without a character, and I was taken aback by how well these two elements clicked together once I combined them, each enhancing the other so well that you'd think they were always meant to be paired.



Mountainhead sees burglar Noah and his son Abraham, get more than the expected

There is a key moment in issue #1, how important is it for readers to avoid spoilers to make the most?
JL: Taking readers on a journey is what we all want to do, in one way or another. That journey can be pleasant or funny or sad or frightening, but I think a good story crafts that sense of a shared experience. And for stories like Mountainhead, I think an important element of enjoying that journey is surprise.

Mountainhead is a story that is going to pull the rug out from under readers' feet at multiple points, not just in issue #1, and I think the best way to experience it is to go in knowing as little as possible. It's certainly made writing solicits for each issue a challenge!

For those who are new to your work, which other books should people check out?
JL: For years, And Then Emily Was Gone was the work I was best known for, and Ryan and I have both talked about Mountainhead playing like a spiritual successor to that comic. But more recently, Sink has become my signature work.

You can purchase Mountainhead #1 from ComiXology for £2.49

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Tammy & Jinty Special

Publisher: Rebellion Publishing
Writer/Artist: Various
Price: £3.99 digital or £4.99 print from shop.2000AD.com

Joining previous revivals like Misty and Scream is the new Tammy and Jinty Special, which is packed full of fantastic female focused stories, and exclusive new work from some of small press' biggest names.

Compared to the more horror focused Misty and Scream, Tammy and Jinty relies on a mix of magic, mystery and science-fiction stories. Also like their weekly fore-bears, this collection features a series of short 3 or 4 page stories that are mix of 'one-and-done's, but with some having the potential to develop into regular series.

Star of the show is Rob Williams and Lisa Henke's Roy of the Rovers spin off, Rocky of the Rovers which is a companion piece to William's re-imagining of the legendary sporting superstar. Rocky is a struggling junior player who lives in her famous relations' shadow, but instead of being a striker she opts to be a defensive midfielder which gives the story a much greater depth, and allows for Williams to tell more complex stories than 'our hero scores in the last minute to win the cup'. It's a bright and energetic read and is a great centre piece if this were to be a regular series.

The remaining stories see a mix of genres and styles from a host of small press stars like Andy Clift,Kate Ashwin, Matt Gibbs, Rachael Smith, Sarah Millman and more, who each bring a unique flavour to their respective stories. More than just a 'comic for girls', this is a fantastic read for all genders, and a reminder of the quality work being produced in the UK comic scene in 2019. We hope is the start of a regular Tammy and Jinty series. **AT**

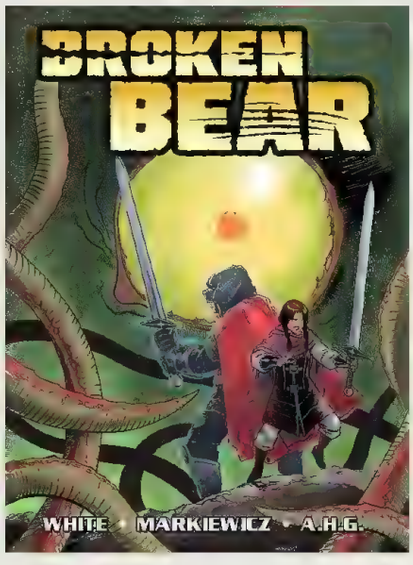
Broken Bear

Publisher: Caliber Comics
Writer: Frankee White
Artist: Adam Markiewicz, A.H.G.
Price: £10 from Good Comics

Broken Bear balance a really classic fantasy feel but with a smart and contemporary edge, thanks to a very intriguing lead.

Selm, the young ward of a powerful ranger known simply as the Bear, makes a Faustian pact with a witch in order to gain her mentor's power and step out of his shadow. Following this betrayal she heads off to the nearest city and there she is drawn into the tyrannical world of local villain Balzur. Can Selm help her new found friends or will she be as dangerous to them as she was to her previous mentor?

Co-creators White and Markiewiz have crafted a really simple story of a girl doing whatever she can to succeed, often at the expense of those around her. It's an interesting inversion of the classic fantasy lead, not just by making her female, but also making her ruthless and often quite unlikeable. Without this strong lead character to build the story around, Broken Bear could be just another generic swords and sorcery tale, but thanks to Selm's unique attitude it gives the whole thing a real depth to the book, that keeps you guessing throughout. **AT**



SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

We look at some great reads which are only available online

We discovered this powerful mini comic from Marvel artist Dean Trippe via a Twitter thread started by the Thought Bubble team asking for recommendations for books that handle issues to do with mental health.

Something Terrible is a personal reflection from Trippe looking back at his own experience of childhood abuse, but also how he addressed his own concerns about it being cyclical when he became a parent. Trippe explains how his discovery of superheroes and comics help him deal with his own childhood problems and the redeeming powers that he learned from them as he grew up and also in his adult life. While this may sound like it trivialises what is such a traumatic incident in Trippe's life it is anything but that. Trippe uses the language and visual shorthand of superhero comics to articulate not only his trauma (including a very poignant moment with the caped crusader), but also his recovery. By using this familiar language and style it makes the story both impactful and very readable - which helps tell the story in an more memorable way.

As you would expect with an artist of Trippe's calibre, the artwork is exquisite, with the whole thing having a Bruce Timm style mix of realism and fantasy. His clever use of visual metaphors give the story an incredible depth and potency to every panel. The thing that you are left with most at the end of reading this story, is not only the horrific nature of what happened to the young Dean, but the redemptive story that he tells. It means the book is as uplifting as it is harrowing, with an ultimately positive message, that cycles can be broken and people can recover from these kinds of incidents. As a result Something Terrible has a message which is enduring and makes it one which people can take inspiration from in order to help improve their own lot. A incredibly powerful and moving piece of art. **Purchase Something Terrible for $5 from www.ironcircus.com**

The Boy Who Loved A Ghost Clown is an incredible webcomic we found via Trujilo's Gustavo Vargas, and is one of those timely reminders of the quality of work that is being released online around the world. Hungarian artist Mark Laszlo's tale of a young boy who becomes obsessed with a singing clown in his local circus, is a mix of Tales from the Crypt and a Victorian Penny Dreadful. It has a really classic tone to it, and feels like it could have been made at any point in the last 60 years, but it has that contemporary edge and stylishness that comes from an increased understanding of what makes comics work. The artwork has this ghoulish quality to it , and swirls around the pages like a plume of smoke, twisting in and out of the panels which are rendered in a haunting black and white pen and ink style. The artwork mixes these dark and creepy images of circuses, with the ghostly clown to create something really haunting. With clowns and circuses very much in the Zeitgeist at the moment there are obvious comparisons to characters like IT's Pennywise the clown, but it is more Christmas Carol meets Tim Burton via The Greatest Showman. It is much more than just a traditional creepy horror story though, it is something more enigmatic and more interesting.

Read it for free at www.behance.net/gallery/77345181/The-boy-who-loved-a-ghostclown-COMIC

Kate Philips' glorious webcomic **High Tide** sees her out of control laundry pile take over her life and she is set adrift on a laundry ocean as a Robinson Crusoe style castaway. The whole story is told wordlessly as she floats aboard her mattress raft on a sea of socks, shirts and underwear. As she attempts to tackle her own procrastination, she is visited by a shark like leather jacket and a shirt that looks like manta ray and there is even a passing ship which bears an uncanny resemblance to an iron, before she is swamped by a tidal wave of socks. It's a series of glorious visual metaphors that really hit home the tediousness of housework, but also the relief of finally taming those jobs you never want to do. The minutiae of daily life is delightfully brought to life and is packed full of originality and some really inspired moments. HIgh Tide is real gem of a read and has made Philips into a creator who we will definitely be paying more attention to in the future. If only because it will inspire our own productivity! **You can read High Tide for free at www.katephillips.net/hightide**

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EURO SCENE

EUROPEAN COMIC REVIEWS

Title: Les Aventures de l'Art
Author: Willem
Publisher: Cornélius

Aventures de l'Art is a fun perspective on the world of art and the people who have been a part of it over the last 150 years or so. It is divided into lots of little stories about individual artists that are sometimes connected and sometimes not.

The strips are alternative views on how an artist rose to fame - they include many of the art world's big hitters - Kandinsky, Mark Rothko, Jeff Koons and Banksy.

For a book about art it isn't particularly colourful - Willem only uses black and white with turquoise or yellow on alternate pages. They don't tell the true tale of the artists' journey to the top.

Some make penchants for satire, handing out moral lessons to investors, creatives and more. It's a real hodgepodge of art and there is an index at the end featuring a brief but sensible description of the artists featured.

Title: Shit is Real
Author: Aisha Franz
Publisher: Drawn & Quarterly

Aisha Franz's Shit is Real is a surreal comic following Selma in a seemingly multidimensional world. The story begins with an abrupt break up after the protagonist loses contact with both her boyfriend Max and her pal Yumi.

She is stranded both professionally and emotionally - being stuck in a dead end job and now single. In her new flat she discovers a neglected black cat belonging to her neighbour.

The black cat becomes entwined in Selma's life leading her to discover new friends both imaginary and real.

Shit is Real is set in a futuristic landscape and keeps you guessing as to what is and isn't the actual present. In parts, Franz uses dialogue sparingly and her black and white drawings demonstrate strong influences from the world of Manga with a cool European edge.

The visual language builds the tension nicely as your mind tries to predict how Selma will meet her maker. A quirky adventure of love-twists, hallucinations and secret parties keeps you guessing right until the end.

Title: Habla María
Author: Bernardo Fernández
Publisher: AM Books

Habla María (María Speaks) is a comic book about Bernando Fernández's personal experience of dealing with his daughter's diagnosis of autism.

Through his concise yet detailed graphic novel Fernández shares his thoughts and feelings on how he and his ex-wife Rebeca came to identify María's condition, come to terms with it and then deal with it.

Not only does Fernández seek to share his very personal journey but he also tries to help the reader understand what autism is and how that can affect the person affected by it and the world around them.

Habla María's greatest success is exactly that - putting the reader in the place of the subject and showing them that people with autism are simply human beings who see the world slightly different to the vast majority of others.

The artwork is strong and uses bold lines and colours. Fernández uses a vast array of panels which conveys his feelings nicely. As the book progresses the colour scheme changes to match with the sentiments expressed by the author.

Personal journeys is rapidly evolving genre of the comic book world and Habla María is a thoughtful addition to it.

Title: Tiny Fox and Great Boar: There
Author: Berenika Kołomycka
Publisher: Europe Comics

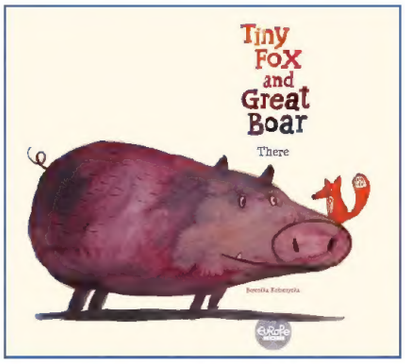
Tiny Fox and Great Boar There is the first installment of a four part series based around the title characters. It is a children's and family comic following the adventures of unlikely friends Tiny Fox and Great Boar.

Berenika Kołomycka is an award winning comic artist from Poland and she brings her script alive with vibrant colouring. She uses a lovely water colour palette with the dialogue and text laid over the top nice and clearly.

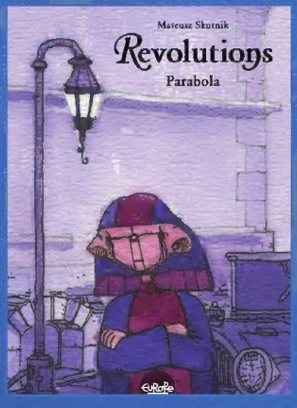
The first part of this series is a short book split down into four chapters making it manageable reading, especially for children.

Tiny Fox and Great Boar form an unlikely friendship when Great Boar turns up to live under the same tree as Tiny Fox. We follow them on their joint adventure of play, foraging and discovery. Like all friendships, it isn't without its trials and tribulations.

Kołomycka has produced fun and colourful comic, which would make great reading for any young child making their first foray into the world of comics.



Title: Revolutions 1. Parabola | **Author:** Mateusz Skutnik | **Publisher:** Europe Comics



Mateusz Skutnik is another Polish comics creator who splits his time between developing computer games and writing graphic novels.

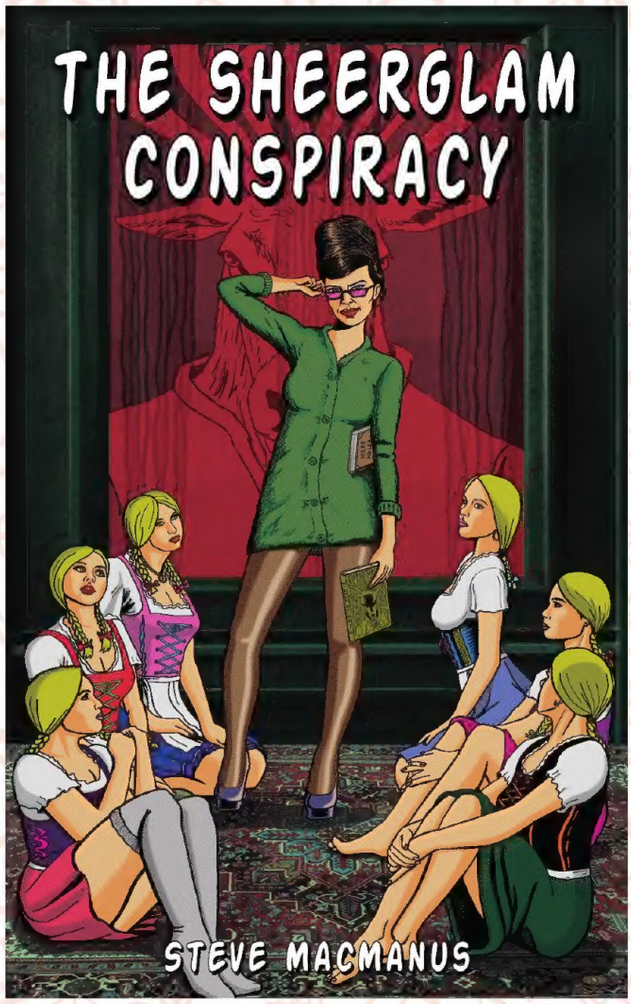
Revolutions 1. Parabola is the first part of another four part series. Skutnik's is set in an alternate universe where a technological revolution is taking place.

The success of the revolution is questionable as some plans go awry. It is a short but hectic book. This first installment introduces several characters. The different characters do separate it into vague chapters but it can be difficult to follow at times and see where the story is going.

Skutnik uses lots of colour and the way he draws the characters gives his universe a true identity of its own.

The follow up books will no doubt fill in some of the gaps as you are left wanting to know more about the different elements of this whacky tale!

Author: Thomas Sargent | **Twitter:** @nousrembobinons



THE SHEERGLAM CONSPIRACY

Chapter One

An exclusive preview of ***Steve (Tharg the Mighty) MacManus*** new novel.

GOODENOUGH PUBLICATIONS INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

To: ALL STAFF
From: GODRIC GOODENOUGH
Subject: NEW LAUNCH
Date: FRIDAY 7.9.1973

The sudden death of my father, Peregrine Goodenough, was a terrible shock to us all. However, the literary torch that he carried with such zeal for nigh on forty years has not been extinguished.

As such, we shall continue to publish first class picture strips celebrating all that is good about being British. In addition, by this memorandum, I hereby announce plans to expand our list of titles.

Monday morning will see work will begin on a dummy for a new comic, one that will no doubt confound our rivals at Tartan Editions.

Naturally, that is all I can reveal to you at this time, other than that the editorial work will be carried out by two brilliant writers, personally recruited by myself, and the codename for the new title is GNP 13.

I wish you all a pleasant weekend and, as ever, remind you of our company motto: Si suus 'bonum sufficit ad Goodenough, tunc suus' bonum sufficit ad legentibus!

G.G.

Goodenough Publications Ltd. 25 Farringdon Street London EC4

GODRIC'S ANNOUNCEMENT spread through the decrepit, four-storey building owned by Goodenough Publications almost as quickly as the flu epidemic that had poleaxed the majority of the company's employees the previous September. At one point back then, all four staff of horror title Frightful had to be sent home nursing high temperatures and scratching at ominous rashes on their hands and faces. Since no one liked the Frightful staff anyway (considering them weirdoes at best and Satanists at worst), it was decided their editorial duties would be taken over by Ted, the post room boy. The unfortunate Ted was thus bundled into the gloomy, fumid depths of Frightful with strict instructions to locate as many pages of artwork that had been lettered as he could and make an issue out of them. This he did, emerging several hours later, wild-eyed but clutching a parcel for the printers containing what would become a much sought after collector's item, on account of its nude vampire seduction scene in the story Diana's Demons. Clearly, the Spanish artist (who was new) had thought he was drawing for an adult title and subsequent editorial directives penciled in the offending picture's margin, instructing the art assistant to, "Cover the vampire's boobies and remove the ecstatic look from Diana's face," had not been carried out. It was no wonder that, on his return from his deathbed, Editor Clive 'Cobweb' Clitus found a cutting memo from Godric Goodenough stuffed angrily in the mouth of the human skull that served as his in-tray.

Being Friday, when work stopped at lunch-time, the majority of staff crowded into the Hoop and Grapes across the road for their end of week ritual of celebrating another set of issues having been sent to press before heading homewards via Farringdon or Waterloo railway stations. Naturally, the main topic of conversation was that morning's memorandum. Speculation filled the air, swirling from table to table. According to Terence Tucker, Goodenough's longest serving employee and jovial editor of Jamboree, he had it on the highest authority that the two creators had already been smuggled into the building and were, at that moment, on the fourth floor, billeted in a room containing two desks, two typewriters, reams of typing paper and carbon paper, camp beds, an adjacent toilet – with lavish supplies of comestibles to be left outside their door each morning.

"My mole in accounts tells me they are on seventy-five pounds a week each," he declared grandly, his thumbs lodged in the pockets of his ash-stained waistcoat, as though he were addressing a jury at the nearby Old Bailey. At this, his rapt audience turned to each other and nodded in agreement that the sum in question was indeed, "A good screw."

The air of jubilation did not escape the staff of Tartan Editions, who also patronised the Hoop and Grapes and who were present in some number, playing pool in the raised area at the back of the pub that was their domain. In order to avoid each other, the staff of either company could have chosen instead to make the nearby White Swan their local, but both parties stayed away because it was the home of an amateur drawing club that met upstairs and no one wanted to become ensnared in its members' enthusiastic endeavours.

Thus, bound by their common prejudice, all either side could do was scowl at the other - the cruder Tartans bemoaning the lack of anything close to a decent pint of Heavy in London and exchanging wolfish remarks as the female staffers from both companies tottered past tipsily, their high heels clacking provocatively across the parquet floor that led to the Ladies.

It was into this typical pre-weekend pub scene that Gloria SheerGlam strode, graceful and elegant as ever. With her blond beehive, tight mohair sweaters and throaty chuckle she was Goodenough's spiritual figurehead. The crowded bar parted before her (for no-one dared cross her path) and she steered a regal course to her usual table where the other two members of her title Patsy sat waiting.

Patsy was the company's sole girls' title, but under the astute editorship of Marion Mildmay, it had survived where so many other girls' titles had failed. This durability was in no small part due to the title's most popular strip, Saints v Sinners, the idea for which had come to Marion during an ill-fated train journey to Paris, where she had been terrorised by a crowd of French school girls who had piled into her first class compartment at Calais without so much as a by-your-leave and then proceeded to smoke endless Gitanes, generating the most awful fug. Saints v Sinners had become Marion's instrument of revenge, allowing her to vent her spleen against the French in general and their education system in particular. Where else could she type the words, "Cheese guzzling cochons!" and have the considerable pleasure of seeing them appear as someone's dialogue in the next episode of Saints v Sinners?

"Good health," said Marion, handing Gloria a glass of her usual Babycham and the two fell to discussing the irksome matter of finding a replacement for Gloria's art assistant, who had somehow wangled herself a job in another publisher's art department, when everyone knew she was frankly lethal with a scalpel. The third person at the table was sub-editor Thisbe Thwaite-Jones, herself newly hired by Marion, despite her mother's belief that she was, "As dim as a ten-watt bulb." The fact that her mother was also Marion's oldest friend, and that her mother had recently acquired a holiday villa in Alcúdia (one that Marion was sure she would be invited to on a regular basis), had not in the slightest influenced Marion's decision to take Thisbe on. And because it was a day of celebration, Gloria allowed herself to be offered a second drink and the call went out to the bar, "Another Cham for SheerGlam!"

At that moment, standing at his office window on the fourth floor, overlooking the Hoop and Grapes, the tall figure of Godric Goodenough could be seen bathed in the autumn sunshine. The room was silent, save for the sound of munching and there was a smell of onion. For it was Godric's custom to eat a raw onion every day in memory of his dear father who had practised the same ritual in honour of Orde Wingate, whose Chindits he had served with in the Burma campaign of 1943. To some, Wingate was a churlish bully, but Peregrine had given him devoted service.

The office was a museum to his father's time in the Far East, decorated as it was with souvenirs of all shapes and sizes, the more valuable items stored in a locked, two door, wooden cabinet that stood against a sliding door which previously had led to his secretary's office. The most prized possessions though were a Gurkha Hat and a Kukri knife, whose curved inward blade could apparently gut an opponent with ease. Tradition said that once drawn in combat, the knife could not be sheathed until it had spilled the blood of the bearer's enemies. "See this nick in the blade here?" his father used to say, swiping the knife vigorously from side to side, before lunging playfully at his terrified audience, "It prevents your opponent's blood from running down the blade onto your hand!"

The Kukri lay on Godric's desk, between his in and out trays, next to an ashtray fashioned from an elephant's foot. The hat hung on the wall behind. The only concession to the fact that this was a publishing office was the popularity chart that also hung behind his desk, its purpose being to record the readers' cumulative votes for their favourite characters. And it was clear that Comanche Cooper (Goodenough Publications' first half-breed hero) was not proving at all popular with the readers, whose precocious, steadfast conservatism never failed to amaze.

And whenever he stood by that window, Godric knew his eye would be drawn inexorably to the catch on the window sill, where there remained a buckle from a man's braces, braces that had belonged to his father. For Peregrine Goodenough had leapt to his death on hearing the dreadful news that the WHANGER CLANGER free gift (promoted as making a noise like a thunderclap) had been cover mounted and distributed to one hundred thousand boys across the land without anyone noticing the literal that now announced the gift as the WHANKER CLANGER. And worse (if there could be such a consideration) the bloody thing did not even CLANG – the sound it made was more like a small sigh. Much like the sigh his father must have emitted when he realised his left brace had caught on the window catch, leaving him suspended, his Bunterish form twisting in the wind until gravity and his own weight made the brace part company with its buckle. It was odd, because the gift design and wording had been the work of Gloria SheerGlam, who never made a mistake and who was visibly mortified when Godric pointed the error out to her.

The shame of his father's suicide had been the catalyst for Godric's decision to launch a new title, despite the altruistic tone of his memorandum. For he was sure that Rory Burns, Tartan Editions' weasel-faced owner, had seen Peregrine twisting in the wind - his office was directly opposite. Godric even imagined that Burns had done a little jig of delight when he saw Peregrine plunge to his death. So, where once Godric had been lukewarm about his father's company, he now saw it as his duty to destroy Tartan Editions, to sew confusion and terror in their ranks, just like the Chindits had done to the Japs and, in so doing, remove the stain of suicide from the Goodenough escutcheon.

After rinsing his hands and pausing only to straighten the sign STEAM ROOM which his secretary had pasted to the outside of his office door (this in reference to his occasional outbursts of temper, sparked, more often than not, by fresh graffiti daubed below in Bear Alley), he left the building by the service lift and strode purposefully up Farringdon on the seven minute walk to Bleeding Heart Yard, where he had an appointment for lunch with the owner of the Knights Templar Art agency. Apparently, there was a problem with one of the Argentine artists on the agency's books. The artist's complaint was unclear, all that was known was that he had purchased a revolver and it now sat on his drawing board – loaded in readiness to shoot the next representative of Goodenough Publications who dared to visit his studio. This would never do.

With the departure of its troubled proprietor, a hush descended over Goodenough Publications, one that enveloped its long, dark corridors and penetrated even its deepest, darkest bowels, until all that could be heard was the ticking of the grandfather clock in reception. But then, there came the faint sound of glasses being clinked, followed by two voices singing in harmony, somewhere on the fourth floor and drifting down the shaft of the service lift.

The lass of Peattie's mill,
So bonny, blyth and gay,
In spite of all my skill,
She stole my heart away.

Her arms, white, round and smooth,
Breasts rising in their dawn,
To age it would give youth,
To press them with his hand.

The Sheerglam Conspiracy
cover artist: Jim Stewart.

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